

CAPTAIN **FUTURE** MAN OF TOMORROW

15¢

SUMMER
ISSUE



MAGICIAN OF MARS

A Complete Book-Length
Scientific Fiction Novel

By EDMOND
HAMILTON

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION



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CAPTAIN FUTURE WIZARD OF SCIENCE

VOL. 3, NO. 1

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SUMMER, 1941

A Complete Book-Length Scientifiction Novel



THE MAGICIAN OF MARS

By
EDMOND HAMILTON

Renegades of Nine Worlds Crush Out from Interplanetary Prison in a Weird Quest for Phantom Treasure! Follow the Futuremen as the Greatest Feud of All Time Catapults Them into the Fifth Dimension.

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Thrilling Short Stories

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If you're that man, here's something that will interest you.

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I'M GOING TO START
TRAINING FOR RADIO
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NO- NOT ME.
I'M NOT GOING TO WASTE
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JUST A MATTER OF
LUCK AND I WASN'T
BORN LUCKY.

BILL SAID
"YES"
HE'S MAKING
GOOD MONEY
IN RADIO
NOW

THIS N.R.I. TRAINING IS
GREAT. AND THEY
SENT REAL RADIO
PARTS TO HELP
ME LEARN
QUICKLY

YOU CERTAINLY
KNOW RADIO.
MIND NEVER
SOUNDED BETTER.

I'VE BEEN STUDYING RADIO
ONLY A FEW MONTHS AND
I'M ALREADY MAKING
GOOD MONEY IN
MY SPARE TIME

THANKS

OH BILL! I'M
SO PROUD OF
YOU. YOU'VE
GONE AHEAD
SO FAST IN
RADIO

YES! I'VE GOT A
GOOD JOB NOW AND
A REAL FUTURE.
THANKS TO
N.R.I. TRAINING

TOM SAID
"NO"
HE'S STILL
WAITING
FOR LUCK

BILL'S A SAP TO WASTE
HIS TIME STUDYING
RADIO AT HOME



SAME OLD GRIND --
SAME SKINNY PAY
ENVELOPE -- I'M
JUST WHERE I
WAS FIVE YEARS
AGO



GUESS I'M A
FAILURE.
LOOKS LIKE
I'LL NEVER
GET ANYWHERE



YOU'LL ALWAYS BE
A FAILURE, TOM.
UNLESS YOU DO SOMETHING
ABOUT IT.
WISHING AND WAITING
WON'T GET YOU
ANYWHERE



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Dept. 1F09
National Radio Institute
Washington, D. C.

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N.R.I. TONIGHT



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Age.....

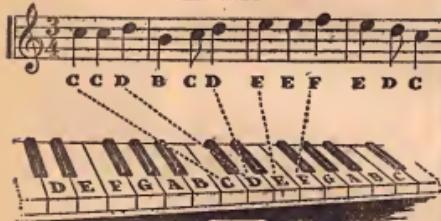
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Play the melody of *AMERICA*
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PLAYS ON RADIO

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* W. H. S., Alabama

* Actual student's names on request
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U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC

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Flute	Saxophone	Cornet
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Name

Street

City State

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Are you getting "paunchy"—worried about constipation, short-wind, nervousness, tiredness? Or are you underweight, anaemic—always getting colds, headaches? Here are some interesting facts it will pay you to read:

Constipation Is One of the World's Plagues

Constipation is so common today that many people do not realize its serious results. Suppose the sewers of a city were clogged, did not drain out daily. Disease and death would break out everywhere! That begins to happen in your system when you are constipated.

But Constipation caused by lack of proper exercise can be overcome. It is the result of carelessness—many of us simply let our bodies "go to seed." First we begin to notice "a little heaviness around the waist." We do nothing about it. Suddenly we find we are FAT! Just carelessness! Then we may begin to get nervous. Short-winded. Peopless. Begin to look old, feel old. Yet are NOT old in years! Even our hair gets lifeless, caked with dandruff. It starts to fall out and—another shock!—DOES NOT COME BACK IN!

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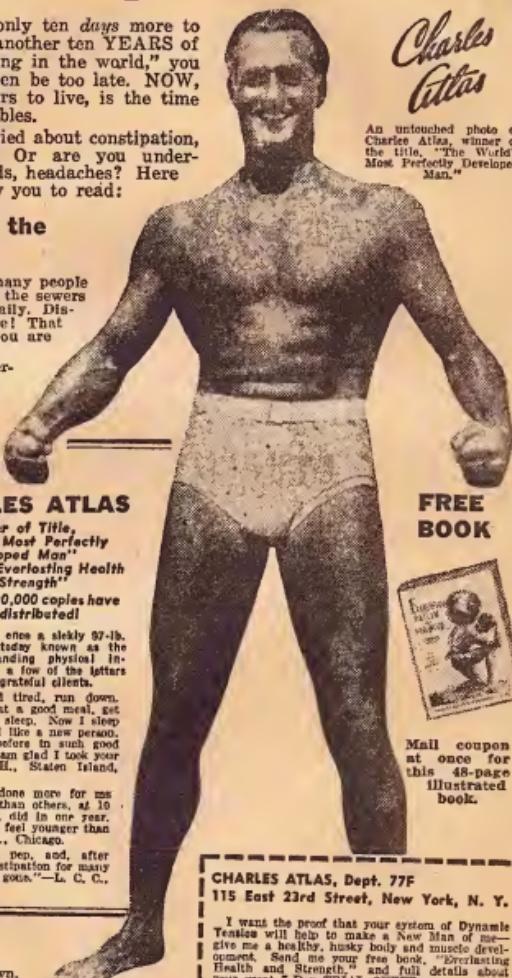
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the title, "The World's
Most Perfectly Developed
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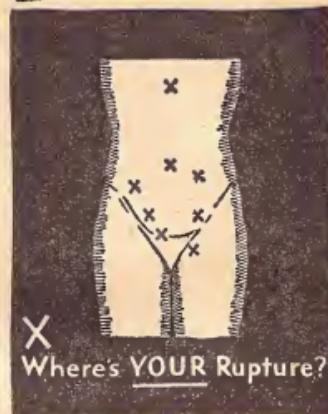
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No . . . don't order a Brooks now—FIRST get the complete revealing explanation of this world-famous rupture invention. THEN decide whether you want the comfort—the freedom from fear and worry—the security—the same amazing results thousands of men, women and children have reported! They found our invention the answer to their prayers! Why save your money? And you risk nothing as the complete appliance is SENT ON TRIAL. Surely you owe it to yourself to investigate this remarkable trial. Send for the facts now—today—hurry! All correspondence strictly confidential.

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No Books No Classes

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and many others

Our Employment Bureau for
graduates gives FREE lifetime
employment service.

READ WHAT THESE GRADUATES SAY

I think the "pay after graduation" plan really offers the fellow who wants to make a go in life a wonderful opportunity... I am now employed by the _____ Power Co. I have been employed by this Company ever since graduating from COYNE. I am almost double what I did at my previous work... COYNE School helped me in landing the job I now have.

James Dible

I have a lot to COYNE... I started my job after returning home from wiring cranes for the _____ Machine Co. Before going to COYNE I was clerking in a grocery store, earning the usual clerk's wages. I was in doubt about quitting my job but I have tripled the cost of the school course in the first ten months. The school is everything you say it is and more... I was completely satisfied. Thanking you for your kind cooperation while at school and since returning home.— Jack E. Stroup.



H. C. Lewis

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City.....

State.....

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building is occupied
entirely by the Coyne
Electrical School.

EXTRA
4 WEEKS
COURSE IN
RADIO
INCLUDED



HI, space-sailors! And a solar salaam to every one of you. It feels great to be back at the controls again, with my flipper on the space-stick and my flat feet on the cyc-pedals.

Hey! One of you space-rats has been bombing the mail-sacks with requests for the sarge's picture. Well, that guy can go chase a meteor. Melt me down into my carbon components if you think I'm going to send out the photo of a mug that can stop every clock and chronometer on all the nine planets.

Do you get it, space-bum? I ain't photogenic and I'm allergic to flashbulbs. So hit the Milky Way, you daguerreotype-moocher!

Which brings us to official business and a time capsule full of etherflashes and spacegrams from the customers. Pilot Calewaert has a lot to say about the orbital course of our flight. Cut jets, men, and coast ship while he says his spiel.

MORE FUTUREMEN WANTED

By Eugene L. Calewaert

Below my letter which was published in the Spring issue of CAPTAIN FUTURE was one by Mr. Raymond Brooke. He says that he does not want the characters of the Futuremen changed. Well, neither do I. However, I do not think it would hurt the novels any to have a new Futureman added. This would not be changing the characters. All of the actual Futuremen at the present are, you might say, rather mechanical. I like them, but they are still mechanical, and yet Mr. Hamilton makes them just as human as Captain Future himself.

Don't you think the story would be better with another man who was flesh and blood like Captain Future? And I think it would be even better that this new Futureman came from 1940-1950, as I stated in my previous letter. I don't say this because it is my idea, and because I want honors conferred upon me. I actually believe that all the readers of CAPTAIN FUTURE will find the story much more interesting with this new Futureman companion in the story.

If Captain Future does come back to the present day—here comes another suggestion—what say he gets a pet, or are there too many of them already? But if he does, let it be a cat. I have a cat as a pet, myself, and I say they are just as smart as dogs. And it would be different, because whenever stories are written nowadays the dog is always the pet. Not that I have anything against dogs. But I would like to change.

Like the brain's new body, or I should say the way he gets around.

"Star Trail to Glory" was the best Captain Future novel so far.

The Magician of Mars returns. Good idea, but please let it be his last return. Don't overdo it. It's all right, in my opinion, to have other characters return, but not more than one or two times—3117 E. Larned, Detroit, Michigan.

P.S.—When I said I wanted a new Futureman, I meant one that would stay with the other Futuremen in their Moon home. For although Marshal Ezra Gurney and Joan work with Captain Future they are not actual Futuremen.

Gyrating nebulae, Pilot Calewaert, but I sure would like to accommodate you quicker than you could shake a comet's tail in regard to your request for surplus Futuremen. Don't you think, though, that an added aide would be as superfluous as an extra moon for Jupiter? And if Cap'n Future expanded his tribe of trouble-shooters every equinox or so, how could he stack them all inside the *Comet*, what with this contracting business Messrs. Lorentz and Fitzgerald are always yelping about?

At any rate, lad, Johnny Kirk, a Future-Futureman, temporarily enters the exclusive family circle in the feature novel for this issue, THE MAGICIAN OF MARS. Come back in ten years and you'll find Johnny slinging proton guns all the way from Ike Levy's Canal Chophouse to Mike O'Brien's Plutonian Bowling Alley.

Comes up next a taxpayer by the name of Perry Watts.

HOME OUT OF RANGE

By Perry Watts

I have just finished Captain Future in "Star Trail to Glory" and I have only one regret. That is that I will have to wait three months till another Captain Future story comes out. (Can't something be done about this? Judging from the letters other people seem to have the same idea as me. Couldn't you at least put it out bi-monthly?) And if Mr. Hamilton can't think of enough ideas for stories you might run a contest in your magazine and ask the readers to send in their ideas.)

I agree with A. Lopez and G. Grainger about Stanley Kovac and I suggest we leave an electric discharge bulb in his pants. I have one other thing to say concerning the reader's department and that is concerning the letter written by Charles Hidley. We may be children, Mr. Hidley, but I'll bet you a meteor diamond against a Martian slug that we enjoy it just as much as you do.

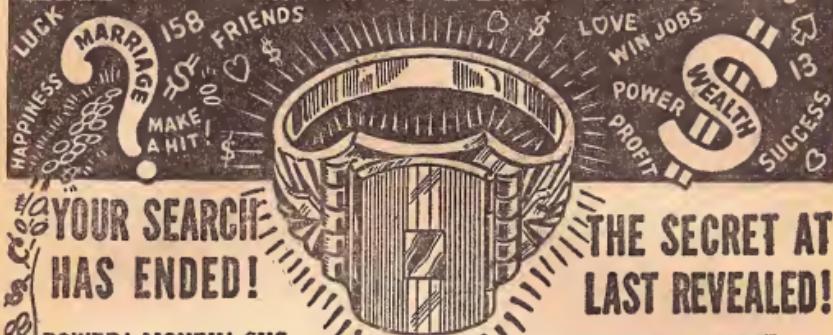
There is one thing I would like to ask. If you will look on page fifty-three (53) you will find a picture of a cowboy on horseback. Could you kindly tell me how he got there? It may have been in a time machine, but I doubt it.

Regarding the question as to whether Captain Future should go back in time, I say no. If he did, it would sound too much like these super-guys that are always going around everywhere. At least that's what I think.

Enclosed you will find (I hope) the frontis-

(Continued on page 121)

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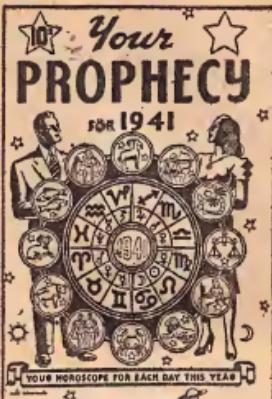
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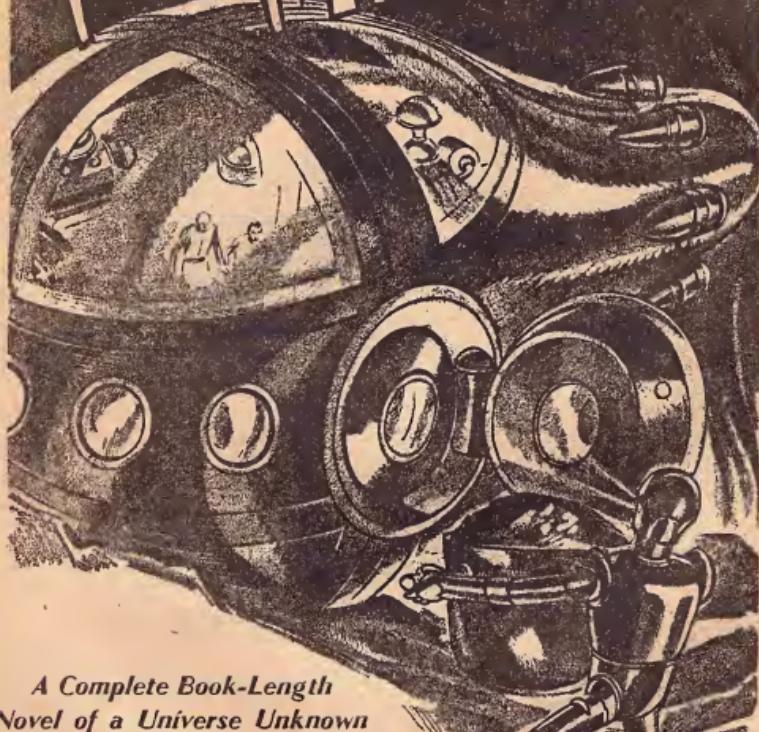
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etary Prison in a Weird Quest
for a Phantom Treasure!**



As fast as Curt and Otho
dug out the radite, Grag
carried it in great loads
over to the COMET (Chap.
XV)

OF MARS

CHAPTER I

Prison Moon

AS the tiny, star-like disk of the Sun sank behind the bleak rock plain, a whistle shrilled harshly through the chill dusk.

"Attention!" barked a tall Saturnian guard.

The hundreds of convicts in gray uniforms who had been excavating beryllium ore from the rock pits, stopped work. They shuffled sluggishly into columns and then stood waiting in sullen silence.

These prisoners were a motley lot,



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representing every world in the Solar System. There were red-skinned Martians, brutal-faced Earthmen, sulky Neptunians with gray skins, and sly-looking white Venusians.

This dreary, forbidding little world was Cerberus, one of the three moons of the planet Pluto. Here was located the great, escape-proof Interplanetary Prison, the living tomb of the most dangerous criminals of all nine worlds.

"March!" snapped the guard. And the columns of convicts shuffled toward the distant, frowning mass of Interplanetary Prison.

A prisoner in the last column glanced furtively at the guards. Then he whispered to the convict marching beside him.

"Tonight," he murmured meaningly. "All of you be ready."

The other convict, a rugged, hard-eyed Earthman, gasped in astonishment.

"It's crazy, Ul Quorn!" he muttered tensely. "I don't know what your idea is, but you'll just get us all killed if you try it."

Quorn made no answer, but there was a smile of confidence in his hooded eyes.

Ul Quorn was different from the other convicts. He was a slender, small man who had the pallid red skin and high forehead of a Martian. But the fineness of his wrists and ankles, the handsomeness of his features, were Venusian. And his sleek black hair and black eyes were those of an Earthman. Ul Quorn was a mixed breed, the most dangerous convict that Interplanetary Prison had ever harbored.

Quorn's hands were calloused from the months of harsh prison labor in the beryllium diggings. No one would have recognized in his silent, shuffling figure the criminal genius who had once terrorized the System by sheer scientific mastery and cunning—the half-legendary Magician of Mars!

Quorn and his comrades marched silently on through the chill twilight, between vigilant guards armed with

heavy atom guns. The dusk was deepening into darkness. In the starry sky bulked the great white sphere of Pluto, the ice-sheathed outpost world of the System. Beyond it gleamed its two other moons, Charon and Styx.

The black, massive walls of Interplanetary Prison loomed in the planet-light ahead. The great doors of inert metal were now open. Bright krypton-lamps cast a white glare on the sullen convicts as they passed across the main court of the prison to the massive cellhouses. Overhead droned fishlike Planet Patrol cruisers, keeping watch upon the moon.

Ul Quorn's column trudged into its own cellhouse, down a bleak cement corridor lighted by krypton bulbs. The hard-eyed guards watched as each prisoner entered his own little cell.

"Lock up!" barked the captain of guards.

The guards came along the corridor, flashing the tiny ray of their vibration-keys on each door-lock, thus sealing it electrically.

"Aura on!" came the final order of the officer.

A soft glow filled the corridor, emanating from flat plates in the ceiling. This glow was a photo-electric aura which would instantly actuate alarms if a prisoner should somehow emerge from his cell into the corridor.

Quorn heard the guards depart. Two would remain on guard at the cellhouse entrance where the aura alarms were located, he knew. The mixed breed sat down on his bunk and waited. The cellhouse grew quiet. There was soon no sound except the soft beat-beat of the ventilation system.

UL QUORN finally rose softly and went to the ventilator-shaft of his cell. It was a six-inch opening covered by a barred grating. Deftly, he removed the grating and drew up four objects suspended in the shaft by cords.

One of the hidden articles was an amazingly compact television set.

the Futuremen Into the Fifth Dimension!

The second was a stubby metal tube with a quartz lens in its end, the third a small glass globe mounted on a little cubical case, and the fourth a tiny, crude-looking atom-pistol. Quorn looked at the things with pride.

"And they believed they could keep the Magician of Mars locked up here

tions," reassured the tense feminine voice. "I won't fail."

Quorn turned off the televisord, thrust it into his jacket. He moved to the door of his cell. In his hand was the second of his instruments—the quartz-lensed metal tube.

The tube was a makeshift vibration-key, similar to those with which the



CAPTAIN FUTURE

forever!" he breathed to himself.

Ul Quorn had achieved the almost incredible feat of secretly constructing these four instruments. For more than two years he had worked, cunningly smuggling in bits of metal and mineral from the mine-workings, and shaping them to his needs by sheer scientific wizardry.

He touched the call-button of the tiny televisord and waited tensely. The instrument had no visi-screen. But soon a voice came from it.

"Ul Quorn?" whispered a silky feminine voice, taut and thrilling. "I'm ready with the ship."

"Good, N'Rala!" murmured the mixed breed. "This is the night. Be here at the third hour, exactly."

"I've memorized all your instruc-

guards locked and unlocked the cells. It had taken all Quorn's scientific genius to make this thing, and to compute the exact frequency of vibration to which it must be set if it were to unlock the cell doors.

He peered out into the corridor, illuminated by the soft glow of the alarm-aura. There was no one there. Quorn thrust his improvised vibration-key out through the little barred opening in his cell door. Then he turned its tiny ray of tuned electric waves upon the lock.

Click! The door was unlocked. Silently, Ul Quorn slid it open. But he did not venture out yet into the corridor. The moment he entered the soft glow of the aura out there, alarm bells would ring.



N'Rala

Quorn took his third instrument, the cubical case crowned by a little glass globe. He touched a switch on its side. The glass globe emanated a spray of fine white radiance several yards around him. Quorn now stepped boldly out into the glow of the corridor.

There was no clanging of distant alarms. The glass-globed mechanism he carried was radiating a "counter-aura." This refracted the beams of the alarm-aura around him and thus prevented a break in the photo-electric warning circuit.

Quorn moved down the corridor toward the cellhouse entrance, as softly and stealthily as a Martian sand-cat. He peered around the end of the hallway into the guard-room at the entrance. Two uniformed guards sat chatting, their atom guns across their knees, relying on the aura-alarms on the wall to warn them if any prisoner should escape his cell.

Quorn raised his crude little atom-pistol. One of the guards, a quick-eared young Venusian, suddenly looked up.

The tiny, needle-like ray of Quorn's

weapon drove instantly between his eyes. The other guard fell dead a second later.

"Easy killing," muttered Ul Quorn coolly. He went to the wall and switched off the aura-alarms. Then he picked up the atom guns of the two slain guards, hastened back along the corridor.

The criminal used his makeshift vibration-key on the lock of a cell. The door slid open. The hard-faced, rugged Earthman in the cell gasped aloud.

"Quorn! How the devil did you get a key?"

"No time now to talk of that, Garson," rasped the mixed breed. "We've got to unlock the others, without rousing all the prisoners."

THE two convicts went into silent action. Gray Garson, the Earthman, helped unlock ten other cells along the corridor. In them were the convicts with whom Quorn had previously discussed escape. They gathered silently in one of the cells.

Quorn studied their hard, tense faces. Besides Gray Garson there was one other Earthman, a grossly fat criminal promoter named Lucas Brewer. There was also Thikar, a giant, brutal, green Jovian space-pirate; Lu Sentu, a cunning-eyed, wizened Mercurian thief; Athor Az, a drowsy-looking Venusian murderer; Xexel, an old Saturnian criminal with a wrinkled blue face and filmy, evil eyes; two somber Martian killers; a sullen-looking Neptunian; and a hairy, towering Plutonian.

"What's your plan, Quorn?" hoarsely whispered Lucas Brewer, his fat face quivering. "You've got us out of our cells but I don't see how we're to escape from the Prison."

"Sure, the Planet Patrol keeps watch around Cerberus night and day," muttered Gray Garson. "No ship can land to take us away."

"We'll get away despite the stupid Patrol," rasped Ul Quorn. "But before we start, I want one matter clearly understood. Once out of here, I give the commands, and the rest of you obey."

He read sulky dislike on their faces.

"You fools!" he hissed. "Without me to lead you, you'd be tracked down and recaptured quickly."

Lu Sento muttered a doubt.

"But what if they put Captain Future on our trail?"

At mention of that name, a lightning-flash of hate seemed to pass across the faces of the other convicts. There was a somber fire in Ul Quorn's black eyes, and his voice was harsh as he answered.

"I hope they do—I've an old score to settle with Captain Future! And so do you all, for it was he who sent most of you here. We'll settle with him, after we've won freedom and the treasure I'm after."

"Treasure?" whispered Lucas Brewster, his small eyes sparkling. "What treasure?"

"The greatest treasure in history!" Ul Quorn told them. "And once we're free, I can lead you to it. We'll be rich, powerful, invincible!"

Avarice was plain on every face in the vicious, motley group.

"What is this treasure? Jewels, precious metals?" Gray Garson asked.

"Something far greater than that," Quorn retorted. "Something so tremendous that it staggers the imagination. It won't be easy to secure, for it's in a well-nigh inaccessible place. But we can get it, if you obey me."

Garson answered for them all.

"We'll follow you, Quorn! But how are we going to get out of here and away from Cerberus?"

"It's almost the third hour," muttered the Magician. "If my plan works, we'll be out of here soon."

He handed one of the atom guns to the big green Jovian.

"You're a good shot, Thikar. Now follow me, all of you, and make no sound."

They were starting down the corridor toward the entrance of the cellhouse when they heard a wild clangor of alarm cells suddenly vibrating through the night.

"They've discovered our break!" cried Gray Garson.

Quorn's black eyes blazed. "They must have had a secret spy-plate in that guard-room, blast them! I was afraid of that. Quick, out of here!"



Ul Quorn, the Magician of Mars

Quorn knew now that somewhere in the guard-room had been hidden a spy-plate, an electric eye by which the chief of guards in the administration building could glance into each cellhouse at periodic intervals. Such a glance had probably revealed the two slain guards.

The clangor of alarms was increasing and there was a sound of running feet out in the main court. As Ul Quorn and his band raced down the corridor toward the entrance, the convicts in all cellhouses awakened. They started to shout in bewildered excitement.

Quorn and his companions burst out of the cellhouse into the night. The gray planet light of Pluto fell on a group of guards running toward them.

"Get them!" snapped Quorn to the giant Jovian beside him. At the same moment he fired his own heavy atom gun from the hip.

The ripping blasts from the two weapons flashed across the court and scythed down the oncoming guards before they were aware of attack.

"We're done for!" wailed old Xexel behind Quorn. "We've not got a

chance in a billion of getting out of here now!"

A NYONE less iron-willed than Ul Quorn would have been unnerved. Alarm bells were still clanging, more guards were running out of the administration building, and the roar of aroused convicts was growing in volume.

Blue beams of krypton searchlights swung down from the guard-towers on the wall, searching the main court. And there was a far-away, increasing droning sound as black cruisers dived on the Prison from high above.

"Patrol cruisers coming!" Gray Garson yelled.

A blue beam bathed their group in its radiance as a searchlight found them.

"Get that light, Thikar!" cried Quorn.

Thikar's atom blast snuffed out the light. But other beams swept toward them, and now the guards across the court were coming toward them on the run and firing as they came. Lu Sentu staggered in his stride as a flashing atom-blast grazed his shoulder.

Ul Quorn paid no attention. His black eyes were intently sweeping the court. Then he saw what he was anticipating.

In a dark corner of the great court, a small, torpedo-like rocket-ship suddenly appeared magically out of nothingness. It poised there, its flaming keel-jets keeping it a few inches above the paving.

"Come on!" cried Ul Quorn, plunging toward the craft.

"Gods of Saturn, where did that ship come from?" gasped old Xexel, his filmy eyes bulging. "It just appeared out of nothing—"

Guards were sprinting to intercept the band before they reached the mysterious little craft. Quorn shot as he ran, with uncanny sureness of aim, and three of the foremost guards fell in scorched heaps.

The door of the little ship opened. A lithe Martian girl appeared in it, tense and beautiful, her dark eyes blazing excitedly.

"Good work, N'Rala!" Quorn cried to her. "Quick, you men!"

His criminal followers tumbled into the little ship after him. Searchlights and atom blasts directed themselves at the craft. But then, as magically as it had appeared, the little ship suddenly vanished!

The Planet Patrol cruisers that roared down over Interplanetary Prison began a frantic search. But though they searched all around the prison moon they found no trace of the mysterious little craft in which the fugitives had disappeared.

CHAPTER II

The Red Torpedo



TWO nights later, the bitter night wind was screaming monotonously across the vast ice-fields of northern Pluto. Beneath the three moons of the arctic planet, the glittering frozen masses stretched endlessly to the horizons. Only at one place did the cheery beacon of lights suggest human existence.

That place was a domed, glassite building situated on a hillock. The structure was really an isolated engineering laboratory at which a great achievement was soon to be attempted. Inside its equipment-crowded interior, the four men of its staff were admiringly contemplating six super-massive cyclotrons which had been but recently installed.

The staff of engineers consisted of a young Earthman, a Venusian, and two tall, hairy Plutonians.

"These cycs will produce a world of power!" the Earthman was exclaiming. "Power enough to melt hundreds of square miles of the ice-fields by our electro-thermal radiation."

"I hope our plan works," said one of the Plutonians soberly. "It would mean much to my people, to have all that melted away."

As he pointed to the glittering, moonlit ice-fields that stretched outside the glassite wall, he suddenly stiffened in surprise.

"Why, look at that!" he gasped. "A ship—"

The four men stood petrified by an incredible sight. Outside the laboratory, a small rocket-ship had suddenly appeared out of nothingness.

As the four engineers gaped, men who carried atom guns came running from the little ship. They burst into the laboratory. Their leader was a slender, red-skinned man with a smooth, handsome face. He wore a striped Martian turban and a long, yellow-sleeved purple Martian robe.

Alarm flashed in the eyes of the young Earthman as he recognized the leader.

"You're Doctor Ul Quorn, the criminal scientist that escaped from Cerberus prison!" he cried. "The one they call the Magician of Mars!"

Ul Quorn bowed mockingly.

"I see that my fame has reached you."

"What do you and your band want here?" demanded the Earthman.

Quorn looked at the six massive cyclotrons.

"We learned about those cyclotrons. We need them."

"You can't have them!" flared the Earthman. "It's taken us years to have them built. We'll not give them up!"

Ul Quorn shot him, his suave face impassive. The atom-blast from the mixed breed's weapon dropped the Earthman in a heap.

The other three engineers stared unbelievingly. Then one of the Plutonians lunged toward the televiser and flung open its switch.

"Calling the Planet Patrol!" he yelled. "Quorn's band is here at North Pluto Labor—"

The atom blast of Thikar, the Jovian, cut the Plutonian down before he could say more. Two more crackling, lightning-like blasts stopped the other two engineers before they could make a move.

"Now, get those cyclotrons out of here and into our ship at once!" Quorn ordered his followers.

"That'll be a job," grunted Thikar, eying the massive machines.

"You fool, we've got to have them!" Quorn lashed. "Without them, we haven't the slightest chance of reach-

ing the treasure I promised you."

The mention of the mysterious treasure inspired the criminals. They began the heavy work of transferring the cycs to their little ship. Ul Quorn watched them. Beside him waited the lithe Martian girl he had called N'Rala. Presently they had the last of the six cyclotrons aboard their craft.

"Quick, out of here now before the Patrol comes!" Quorn ordered.

Their little rocket-ship rose from the ice-field. Then magically, it vanished.

The heaving blue sea that swept almost all the planet Neptune, gleamed in the sunlight. It washed against the rock cliffs of a small group of barren islands five hundred miles south of the Black Isles.

Upon one of these desolate islets were the metalloy shops and docks of Neptunian Oceanic Research Station. The pompous, gray-skinned, peaked-skulled Neptunian who directed the activities of a half-score scientists here was shaking his head.

"There's a lot of money in those metal bars," he declared.

HE and one of his subordinates were eying a mass of long bars of blue-gleaming metal which lay in one of the supply-houses.

"Well, that alloy is expensive," admitted his assistant. "But it's about the strongest known to science. With it we can build a diving ship that will go down into even the greatest depths of our ocean. Just think, sir, what that will mean! We can explore the great oceanic abysses for the first time," he ended enthusiastically.

"Yes, I know," agreed the older Neptunian impatiently. "But this stuff's so valuable it might tempt thieves. It's only been a few days since Ul Quorn's band raided that North Pluto laboratory, remember."

The younger man scoffed politely at his superior's apprehensions.

"Oh, well, Quorn's criminals probably just wanted those super-powered cyclotrons to give their ship more speed. They wouldn't want this alloy."

The younger Neptunian was wrong. That evening a small rocket-ship appeared magically behind the research

station. The staff of the station did not hear it, nor did they hear Ul Quorn and his men emerge from the ship.

"Take no chances of them giving an alarm this time," ordered Quorn, his black eyes merciless. "Cut them down at once."

The Neptunians had no chance. They were absorbed planning their new diving ship when the criminal band charged in upon them.

The hideous crackle of atom-gun blasts was brief. Then the Neptunian scientists lay on the floor in scorched, unmoving heaps.

"Good work!" approved Ul Quorn. "Now get those bars of alloy into our ship."

Thikar, the Jovian, muttered protestingly to Gray Garson.

"First we stole the super-cycs and now it's these metal bars. Why don't we loot something worthwhile, like gold or radium?"

"Quorn knows what he's doing," Garson retorted. "He's preparing to secure a treasure worth all the gold and radium in the System."

"That's what he says. But he doesn't tell us what it is," grumbled the Jovian. "He just says it's something great."

The bars of alloy finally loaded in the ship, the craft rose from the rocky isle into the gathering twilight. It poised for a moment, then vanished.

The quiet dusk deepened. One of the scorched Neptunian bodies stirred slightly. This man was not dead, but was dying. He feebly tried to write with his own bloody finger on the floor. *"Quorn did—"* But he was dead before he could finish his message.

HIGH in Government Tower, in the city of New York on Earth, was the center of the great web of the Planet Police. Here functioned the vast organization that maintained the law throughout the system. Here were headquarters of its four divisions—the planetary police, the colonial police, the secret service, and the famous Planet Patrol.

Halk Anders, Commander of the entire organization, paced his office restlessly. He was a stocky rock of a man, with a massive head and grim, scarred face.

He turned to face two other people, a girl and an older man. The girl was Joan Randall, ace secret service agent. The older man was Marshall Ezra Gurney, famous police veteran.

"We don't need to do that!" Halk Anders told the girl angrily. "Ever since Quorn's bunch escaped you've been deviling me to have the President call in Captain Future. I'm tired of it. Just because you and Ezra are on assignment to work with Future, you want him on every case."

Joan Randall faced her irate chief calmly. She was a slim girl in gray silk space-jacket and trousers, with dark hair and liquid brown eyes.

"But, Chief, the Patrol can't cope with Quorn!" she protested. "That mixed breed is the greatest scientist in the System—except one. This weird vanishing ship he's using shows what he can do."

"I think maybe Joan is right, Halk," drawled old Ezra. "Remember, it took Cap'n Future to get Quorn the first time."

Ezra Gurney was a white-haired, wrinkled-faced old man with faded blue eyes, who chewed rial leaf deliberately as he spoke.

"Well, we'll get Quorn this time ourselves," boomed Anders. "He got away from Cerberus, and gave us the slip after his raid on the Pluto laboratory. But he won't give us the slip this time!"

"What makes you so danged sure you're goin' to get him now?" demanded Ezra Gurney.

Halk Anders explained. "As soon as I got word of Quorn's raid on the Neptunian research station, I had a net of Patrol cruisers flung around that whole sector of space to trap him. They've been closing in that net, and though Quorn may vanish in that queer way he'll surely have to reappear somewhere inside their sector. I'm expecting a report that they've caught him at any moment."

"Ah, here's the report now!" he continued as a Martian officer entered the office and saluted. "Did they get him, Mako?"

The Martian officer shook his head.

"Sorry, sir—Quorn must have slipped them again. I just got a flash

that Quorn's band held up the space-freighter *Eros* off Saturn. They looted the freighter of certain valuable atomic machine-tools. Then they vanished as usual in their own craft."

"Well, Halk," drawled old Ezra dryly, "it looks like Quorn and his vanishin' ship gave the Patrol the slip again."

Halk Anders' face was purple.

"By all the space-gods, I give up! I can catch any ordinary criminal or pirate, but that slippery breed can vanish and reappear as he pleases, and that's too much for me!"

"Then you'll have the President call Captain Future?" Joan Randall asked eagerly, her dark eyes glowing.

"Yes, blast it, I will," swore the enraged Commander. "Come along."

James Cartew, the gray-haired President of the Solar System Government, had his offices in the topmost suite of Government Tower. He listened gravely as Halk Anders blurted out his request. The Commander concluded bitterly: "So I'm asking you to call Captain Future, though it's an admission of my own failure."

"No, Commander," denied the President quietly. "You've done all anyone could do. The cold fact is that Ul Quorn's distorted scientific genius makes him invulnerable to the ordinary Patrol methods. The System has only one scientist capable of combatting that criminal."

CARTHEW rose to his feet.

"Captain Future isn't home on the Moon now. He and the Future-men left weeks ago on a research expedition. They did not say where they were going. We will have to call them by the red torpedo!"

Cartew led the way up a small stairway to the little square deck that was the very topmost tip of Government Tower. Only two men were allowed to land their ships on this deck —the President and Captain Future.

It was magnificent up here in the darkness between the wind and the stars, the brilliance and splendor of the greatest city in the System spread far below. The great avenues were



"Papa, don't you know me?" cried the tin figure.
"I'm your sonny boy!" (Chap. V)

like rivers of blue-white krypton light, flowing northward to the space-port.

Carthew stepped toward a thing in a special cradle at the rail, a six-foot metal torpedo that looked like a miniature space ship.

"Captain Future left this here," he explained to Anders. "He said that when he was not in his Moon-home and so could not be reached by our North Pole beacon, this thing would find him."

He touched a button upon the side of the torpedo. Then he stood hastily back from it as red fire jetted from its lower end.

Swoosh! With a bursting gush of crimson flame from its stern, the metal cylinder soared skyward at incredible speed. It blazed across the heavens like a tiny red comet. In a twinkling it was gone.

JOAN RANDALL looked after it with brilliant eyes.

"I wonder where it's gone?" she murmured. "I wonder where Curt and the Futuremen are now?"

"Wherever they are, they'll be zoomin' back here soon," muttered old Ezra confidently.

Halk Anders put a doubtful question to the President.

"Who is Captain Future, really? Oh, I know I've worked with him and his three Futuremen, the Brain and the robot and that android, in more than one case. But I've never yet learned just who he is and where he came from and how he acquired his mastery of science."

James Carthew hesitated before replying.

"That's a story known only to Ezra and Joan and myself—and one other. But I don't think Captain Future would mind if I told it to you."

The President looked off into the windy darkness as he spoke.

"A generation ago there was a brilliant young scientist here on Earth. His name was Roger Newton. He had made certain valuable scientific discoveries that were coveted by an unscrupulous man named Victor Corvo. To escape Corvo's plots, young Newton fled to a refuge on the barren,

lifeless Moon. With him went his young wife and his colleague, Simon Wright."

"Simon Wright?" echoed Halk Anders in surprise. "You mean the Brain?"

"Yes, the Brain," nodded Carthew. "Wright had been a famous, aging scientist here on Earth. Newton removed his living brain from his dying body and placed it in the serum-case which it still inhabits."

"Roger Newton and his wife and the Brain built a laboratory-home on the Moon under Tycho crater," he continued. "There they created two intelligent living creatures—Grag, the metal robot, and Otho, the synthetic android. And there was born Newton's son, Curtis."

"But Victor Corvo pursued them to the Moon. He killed Newton and his wife—and was himself killed by the Brain and robot and android. It was those three unhuman, superhuman beings who reared the infant Curtis Newton to manhood in that wild, lonely lunar home. They raised him to be the finest scientist and the swiftest, strongest adventurer in the System. When Curtis Newton reached manhood, he entered the life-work he had chosen."

James Carthew looked back into memory.

"I remember the night Curtis first came here. He told me he meant to devote his life to combating such interplanetary criminals as had killed his parents. He said he would call himself Captain Future, and that whenever I had need of him I had but to signal and he and the three Futuremen would come. And he has come, many times. He has crushed many criminals. But he'll go after Quorn with an even fiercer purpose, a greater determination."

"Why so?" Halk Anders asked. "I know he trapped Quorn before, but why should he hold a grudge against the breed?"

Carthew answered the Commander somberly.

"Ul Quorn is the son of Victor Corvo, who killed Future's parents! There is a blood-feud between those two men."

CHAPTER III

The Futuremen

FAR, far outside the Solar System, in the vast and awesome depths of space that stretch toward the stars, the formless black bulk of a great cloud of cosmic dust was drifting. Clinging to the edge of that cloud, coasting along its dark shores, moved a small tear-drop space ship.

It was the *Comet*, famous ship of the Futuremen. In its main laboratory cabin, bent intently over an elaborate scientific instrument, Curt Newton was occupied making observations on the cloud.

"I've nearly got its course plotted now, Simon," announced Curt without raising his head from the eyepiece.

"Better take a couple more readings to make sure, lad," rasped a metallic voice beside him.

"I'm going to," agreed Curt. "But I'm almost certain that the cloud will pass billions of miles from our System."

He continued studying the cloud through his electro-telescope. Curt Newton, the red-haired young wizard of science known to all men as Captain Future, had come out here with his Futuremen to ascertain the course of this dark, drifting cosmic cloud. He wanted to be sure that it would not drift into the System itself.

He and his comrades had been checking the speed of the drifting dust for days. They were so far in outer space that the Sun itself seemed only one bright star among the myriad stars that spangled the firmament.

Curt finally straightened.

"All readings check!" he announced crisply. "The cloud won't come near the System, thank the stars!"

Curt Newton made a striking figure, standing erect. He was six feet

four in height, long-legged and wide-shouldered in his green zipper-suit. He had the lean, rangy look of a fighter, an impression strengthened by the proton-pistol whose well-worn butt protruded from a holster at his belt.

But underneath his disordered mop of red hair, Captain Future's tanned, handsome face and keen gray eyes were those of a thinker and dreamer. Deep in those clear eyes glimmered the brilliant intelligence that made him the greatest scientist in the System. Mentally, as well as physically, he was truly a man of tomorrow.

"Simon, I want to have a look inside that cloud," he declared to his companion. "The instruments show there are solid bodies inside it."

"It'll be dangerous venturing into that dust," warned the Brain. "Even with our infra-red searchlights, we'll be flying half-blind."

Simon Wright, the Brain, was a curious spectacle as he hovered beside Curt. He was a living human brain housed in a square, transparent case whose circulating serums kept him alive. He had artificial glass lens-eyes mounted on flexible stalks on the front of his case, above his resonator speech-apparatus and between his microphone ears. The Brain had an ingenious means of locomotion. Magnetic beams he could jet from his case supported him in the air, enabled him to propel himself in every direction.

"Let's take the chance!" Captain Future proposed eagerly. "We may never again have such an opportunity."

"I see you're set on the crazy idea, lad," rasped the Brain's metallic voice. "All right, let's risk our lives for nothing."

"What would life be worth without a little risk?" laughed Curt. He strode toward the control room. "I'll tell Grag and Otho."

In the control room, Grag, the robot, sat in the pilot-chair and kept the *Comet* coasting the cloud. Otho was working intently on the floor.

"I'll take over, Grag," Curt told the robot. "We're going to have a look inside the cloud."

"I don't see why," grumbled Grag as he gave up the pilot-chair. "We haven't lost anything in there."

Grag's metal body towered seven feet high. His massive jointed arms and legs hinted of the physical power that made him the strongest being in the System. His mighty metal figure, his bulbous metal head and gleaming photo-electric eyes, made him an awe-inspiring figure.

"Go back and check the cycs before we enter the cloud," Curt directed him. "We don't want to have any trouble once we're in there."

"Let Otho check the cycs!" protested Grag in his booming mechanical voice. "While I've stood shift for hours, he's been playing."

OTHO looked up from the pieces of metal he was assembling. "Playing?" he retorted indignantly. "I'm about to accomplish a valuable scientific achievement."

Grag grunted scornfully.

"I'll bet it's valuable! It'll be like that new-fangled space-suit you invented, that we had to cut you out of."

"You just wait and see," Otho promised mysteriously.

Otho, third of the Futuremen, was a synthetic man, or android. His body was quite human in shape but was of rubbery white synthetic flesh. And though his hairless head was well-shaped with regular features, his slanted, mocking green eyes had depths of alien, ironical intelligence.

Otho suddenly uttered a hissing cry of anger. A small, gray animal with sharp snout and beady little eyes had been sniffing at a metal cylinder among his materials while he was arguing.

"Get away from my work, you cursed little pest!" swore Otho, cuffing the little beast aside.

Grag snatched up the animal.

"You cuff my Eek again and I'll stretch your rubber neck from here back to the Sun!" he threatened Otho.

"He was going to eat one of my metal pieces!" raged the android. "I ever I get that nasty little pet of yours alone—"

Eek, the guilty little animal,

cringed on Grag's shoulder. The little beast was a moon-pup, a species of non-breathing, telepathic animals that ate metals and minerals. Grag had adopted him as a pet, but Otho hated his insides.

"I'll bet he's been chewing at this cylinder," Otho exclaimed, anxiously picking up the metal part at which Eek had been sniffing.

Then an astonishing thing happened. The metal cylinder changed shape in Otho's hands. It squirmed and flowed and shifted shape and color and was suddenly a fat, doughy little animal with short, thick legs and big, solemn eyes.

It was Oog, Otho's own pet. Oog was a meteor-mimic, from a genus of animals on a distant asteroid which had the power of shifting the cells of their bodies at will to imitate any object or animal.

Curt burst into laughter.

"It's your own little mutt, Otho," he chuckled.

"Cursed if it isn't," swore Otho. "Oog, you know better than this."

"Now get back and check those cycs, before I heave you and Grag and your whole menagerie out of the ship," Curt threatened.

Otho put away his mysterious work and hastened back to the cyc-room in the stern. Quickly he returned to report the cycs all in order.

"All right, here's where we eat dust," Captain Future remarked.

He shifted the space-stick to the right. Now, instead of skirting the edge of the great black cloud, they were at once in the strangling darkness. But Curt snicked on the powerful infra-red searchlights, and these cut a dim path through the dust. His foot resting lightly on the cyc-pedal, Curt eased the ship further inward.

They cruised slowly through the dust for several hours. By gravitometer and meteorometer readings, Curt located the few solid bodies in the cloud. They proved to be lifeless, barren rock masses of asteroid size.

"Not much in here really worth inspecting," Curt Newton admitted.

"Something's coming up behind us!" Grag yelled. "There it comes—

looks like a red-hot meteor bearing down on us!"

Curt turned swiftly, glimpsed the burning red speck rushing upon them from behind. Hastily he jammed the cyc-pedal down and flung the space-stick over. The *Comet* veered away with a roar of rocket-tubes. But the plunging red speck instantly veered its course also, to follow them.

"Fiends of Pluto, the thing's following us!" Otho hissed.

"Hold it!" Curt exclaimed suddenly. "That's no meteor. It's the torpedo signal! We're needed at Earth!"

It was the red torpedo that President Carthew had launched from Earth. Propelled by its super-powerful charge, it had plunged into outer space at a speed almost that of light. It had followed an invisible beam straight to the *Comet*, veering aside only when its automatic steering-mechanism operated to make it avoid space ships or meteors in its path.

Now it was automatically circling the ship of the Futuremen. Even through the cosmic dust, the torpedo blazed its red summons. It had been made to emit infra-red light capable of penetrating any obscurity.

CAPTAIN FUTURE'S gray eyes flashed.

"Something's up back there at Earth, boys! We're blasting back right now!"

A tension had gripped them all. The Futuremen fully realized the significance of that urgent summons. Curt rapidly drove the *Comet* back out of the cosmic cloud. Then he really opened her up. With all the power of its nine mighty cyclotrons pouring from its tail-tubes, the little ship screamed Sunward.

Within a time that seemed incredibly short, the ship was roaring down toward the great greenish sphere of Earth. Curt Newton glanced toward the silvery, barren globe of the Moon as they raced down past it.

"Can't take time now to stop," he muttered, referring to their home.

He had already flashed a televiser message ahead to inform of the time of his arrival. Precisely on schedule,

the little ship was diving across the daylight side of Earth toward sunlit New York.

Curt Newton's keen eyes discerned the gleaming spire of Government Tower soaring above the streets and parks of the metropolis. He sent the *Comet* rushing down toward the little square deck atop the tower at suicidal velocity. Then, with a blast of the brake-tubes, they landed.



JOHNNY KIRK

"Come on!" he told the others, opening the airlock door. "They're waiting for us."

The Futuremen made a weird quartet as they emerged down the stairway into the President's office. James Carthew sprang to his feet. Joan Randall and Ezra Gurney and Commander Halk Anders came forward eagerly.

Captain Future's gray eyes swept them.

"Looks like everyone's here tonight. Must be something big in the wind."

"Something big is right, blast it!" swore Halk Anders.

"Now, quiet down, Halk," drawled Ezra. "Halk's a little excited, Cap'n Future. But he's got plenty of reason to be."

"I'll say he has!" Joan Randall

cried tensely to Curt. "We've really got our hands full this time."

"Oh, we have, do we?" Curt repeated dryly. "You've already figured out that I'm going to need your invaluable assistance, have you?"

"Sure I have," retorted Joan calmly. "This'll give me a swell chance to use my seductive feminine wiles on you, you big mug."

Ezra Gurney chuckled.

"She ain't entirely foolin', Cap'n Future."

"It's excitement she's crazy about, and not me," scoffed Curt Newton. He looked at the President. "Just what is it that's happened?"

"Ul Quorn is out," said James Carthew gravely.

There was a dead silence. Captain Future's good-humored, handsome face suddenly froze. It became dark and grim as he heard the name of his great enemy.

"Quorn escaped?" gasped Otho. "Devils of space, then we will have our hands full!"

"An' that ain't all," drawled Ezra Gurney. "He took out with him a dozen of the most dangerous prisoners on Cerberus."

"How did they escape?" Captain Future demanded rapidly.

"Captain Future, we don't know," confessed Halk Anders. "Quorn got the others out of their cells somehow. A little ship suddenly appeared in the prison court. They piled in it, and then that ship disappeared."

"You mean, the ship escaped by becoming invisible?" Curt asked.

"No, it didn't just become invisible—it just wasn't there any more!" insisted the Commander. "Patrol cruisers were right on top of it when it vanished. They tore the air to ribbons with their blasts, but they didn't get that ship. It was simply gone into nothingness!"

"That is unexplainable," Captain Future muttered. "Unless Quorn used some totally new scientific principle—"

"Maybe he learned the accelerator-secret that Gray Garson used in his space-ship hijackings?" Joan Randall suggested.

"No, he couldn't have," Curt bleakly answered. "When we sent Garson to prison, we used my 'mental eraser' device to make him lose all memory of the accelerator-secret."

HALK ANDERS went on to tell of the raids by Ul Quorn's band on the Pluto laboratory and the Neptunian research-station.

"And his latest feat was to hold up the freighter *Eros* off Saturn and rob it of atomic tools," the Commander concluded. "With that vanishing ship of his, he's just laughed at the Patrol's efforts to catch him."

"That's why it was decided to call you, Captain Future," James Carthew said. "We're afraid that these preparations of Quorn portend some big coup on his part."

"There's no doubt of it," agreed Captain Future. "Quorn is no petty criminal, whatever else he is. He's got something big planned."

Halk Anders faced Curt. "The captain of the *Eros*, the ship that Quorn held up and robbed, landed in New York yesterday. He says that Ul Quorn gave him a message for you, Captain Future."

Curt stiffened.

"A message for me from Quorn? Where is the man?"

"I can call him in a few minutes," the Commander answered. "He said he'd be waiting near here."

A few moments later the Commander returned to the office with a stiffly striding old spaceman whose bald head and face were deeply bronzed.

"This is Captain James Willis of the *Eros*," he said.

Ezra Gurney strode forward.

"Jimmy Willis! I haven't seen you since we were space-kids together!" the old marshal exclaimed delightedly.

Captain Willis stared a moment at the old marshal, and then held out his hand.

"Oh, Ezra Gurney," he said. "Glad to see you, Ezra."

Curt Newton stepped forward.

"I'm Captain Future. How is it that Ul Quorn came to give you a message for me?"

Captain Willis explained in a slow, deep voice.

"My freighter was two million miles off Saturn, bound for Neptune with a cargo of atomic machine tools to be used in undersea-ship construction. Quorn's little ship suddenly appeared in space beside us. They had a couple of heavy atom-guns trained on us. We were unarmed and couldn't resist.

"Quorn made me come aboard his craft as a hostage," Captain Willis continued. "He sent his men into my freighter to rob it of part of our cargo of machine tools. Then, when he had what he wanted, Quorn let me go back to my ship. But first he gave me a message that he said I was to deliver to Captain Future when I got back to Earth."

"What was Quorn's message?" Curt Newton demanded grimly.

Captain Willis fumbled in the pocket of his space-jacket.

"It was this," he said.

And the freighter-captain drew an atom pistol from his pocket and fired it pointblank at Captain Future!

CHAPTER IV

Solar System University



CURT NEWTON had moved swiftly a second before the freighter-captain drew the weapon. Curt had noticed something significant about the old space-man's appearance which warned him an instant before

the deadly attack.

Thus it was that when the crackling blast of atomic force from the pistol shot toward him, Captain Future was already lunging beneath it. It blazed past his red head. The next moment he was upon Willis. A quick wrench of the freighter-captain's wrist sent the weapon from his hand.

The others had been too stunned by the unexpected attack to move. But

now, with a booming roar of rage, Grag leaped forward and pinioned Captain Willis inside his great metal arms.

"He tried to kill you, Chief!" roared the robot. "I'll break him into bits!"

"No, wait!" Curt cried to Grag. "Hold him, but don't hurt him!"

Ezra Gurney uttered a dumfounded exclamation.

"Devils of space, I can't understand this! Jimmy Willis is one of my oldest space-pals. Why would he try to kill you?"

"Ul Quorn bribed him to do this!" Joan cried, her eyes blazing.

"No, not that," declared Curt Newton. "This man isn't responsible for his actions—he's a mere tool of Quorn's, operated by remote brain-control."

"Remote brain-control?" repeated Halk Anders bewilderedly. "What are you talking about?"

"It's one of the pleasant little devices of the Magician of Mars," Curt answered grimly. "A tiny instrument which, when it is imbedded in a man's skull and attached to his brain's nerve-centers, completely cuts out his own will and personality and makes him a mere automaton controlled from a distance by a similar instrument. The control is along an undimensional beam that operates almost instantaneously over any distance."

Curt pointed to a faint scar on the crown of the bald head of Captain Willis.

"That's where the control-instrument was implanted in his skull. This man is a mere automaton now. From somewhere in the System, Ul Quorn is at this moment seeing and hearing through this man's eyes and ears."

"A trick of that devil Quorn to murder you, Chief!" Otho cried. "He must have planted the control in Willis' skull when he had him as a hostage aboard his own ship, and then sent him here to get you!"

Captain Future nodded calmly.

"Undoubtedly he did. That's why I was on guard when this man came in. It seemed strange to me that Ul Quorn would have allowed him to go free after the robbery of his ship. Quorn is ordinarily ruthless, as shown

by the fact that he left no survivors after his Pluto and Neptune raids. I figured he had some hidden reason for letting Captain Willis go. And observing Willis closely, I noticed that he didn't seem to know his friend Ezra Gurney. That made me remember Quorn's brain-control device. I spotted the scar on his head just before he acted."

James Carthew, the President, had witnessed the astounding scene with unbelieving eyes. Now he spoke incredulously.

"Then that man Quorn can at this moment see and hear us through the senses of Captain Willis?"

"He can," Curt Newton declared. "Ul Quorn's will rules this man's body from whatever place in the System that Quorn is lurking in at this moment."

Captain Willis spoke. His eyes stared straight into Captain Future's face as his loud, deep voice sounded. "You're right, Future," he said. "This is Ul Quorn talking."

The President shivered.

"Good God—this is uncanny!"

Willis' stiff lips moved again.

"I knew you'd be called in against me, Future, so I laid this little plan. Neat, wasn't it? It would have succeeded against any other man. I compliment you on your alertness."

Curt Newton spoke bleakly to Captain Willis.

"Quorn, I know you can hear me through this man even though you're millions of miles away. I warn you now—I'm not out to put you away in prison this time, but to destroy you. After your killings in those raids, there'll be no quarter!"

"No quarter suits me, Captain Future!" rang Willis' hollow voice. "When I have accomplished what I intend to do, I'll be able to hunt you and your precious Futuremen down and repay you for everything."

THE scene was one of weird drama. Captain Future and his great antagonist, the Magician of Mars, facing each other in bitter challenge through the automaton-like form of the old space captain! Facing each other, even though at this very moment they

were miles apart in the universe! "War to the death!" Quorn repeated in Willis' voice. "And this time, Future, I'll have a weapon that can crush even you!"

Captain Willis suddenly went limp and fell in a senseless heap.

"Ul Quorn has relaxed his control of the man," Curt declared.

"Can't you take that hellish thing out of his skull?" Ezra Gurney asked anxiously. "Jimmy Willis is one of my oldest friends."

"It won't be hard to remove the brain-control," Captain Future answered. "Get the surgical kit from the *Comet*, Otho."

Otho was back in a moment with the instruments. The others witnessed the uncanny surgical skill of Captain Future as he deftly made an incision and removed a tiny, button-like instrument from Willis' head.

"He'll come back to consciousness as his normal self," Curt promised as the unconscious space-captain was taken out. "Quorn's stroke at me missed. Though that devil will strike again as soon as possible."

Curt paced up and down the office, frowning.

"We've got to find out the nature of Quorn's vanishing ship, his power to disappear and reappear at will. Until we know how to combat that power, we can't hope to meet Quorn on even terms."

He looked at Halk Anders.

"Wasn't there any clue at all as to how Quorn's ship was able to vanish into nothingness?"

The Commander hesitated. "We have something that *might* be a clue, Captain Future. Some weeks ago, a young Satirian scientist named Skal Kar was mysteriously murdered. He had a secret laboratory on Ariel, the inmost moon of Uranus. One night he brought to his laboratory a Martian girl with whom he'd become infatuated. He took her into the building. A little later, the guards outside heard a disturbance. They forced their way into the laboratory. They found Skal Kar murdered—and the Martian girl had vanished into nothingness!"

"She vanished from that building,

just as Quorn's ship is able to vanish," Anders continued. "We've not been able to find her. But we've suspected there might be a connection with Quorn's escape from Cerberus. For the Martian girl answers the description of—N'Rala."

"N'Rala—Quorn's sweetheart?" exclaimed Curt. His gray eyes narrowed. From Otho and Grag came exclamations of surprise.

They had good reason to remember Ul Quorn's wicked Martian sweetheart, from the previous epic struggle between Curt and Quorn.

"I thought that that girl was still in prison," rasped the Brain.

"No, she was released a few months ago," informed Halk Anders. "She got a light sentence in Mars prison, at the time you rounded up Quorn's accomplices in the Space-stones case. She pleaded that she'd only been an innocent tool of Quorn, that he'd hypnotized her."

Joan Randall sniffed.

"That Martian hell-cat innocent? She ought to have been given a life sentence."

Ezra Gurney grinned at the indignant girl agent.

"You're still jealous of N'Rala because she tried to use her wiles on Cap'n Future, eh?"

"Jealous of that red devil?" exploded Joan. "Why, you—"

Curt was asking the Commander another question.

"What scientific work was this Skal Kar engaged in?"

Halk Anders shrugged. "We don't know. He was so secret about it he didn't let even his own guards into his laboratory."

"He must have been plenty secret about it, to carry it on upon that wild little jungle moon," Curt muttered. "The way N'Rala vanished after she murdered him seems to indicate that she stole from Skal Kar the power of vanishing that Ul Quorn is now using. If we could learn what Skal Kar was working on, we'd know what Quorn's new power is!"

Halk Anders handed Newton some folded papers.

"Here's the report of our Uranus branch on the murder, but I'm afraid

it won't help any in our search."

Curt studied the report closely. There was a brief biography of Skal Kar, the murdered man. He was a native Saturnian, had been educated in science at a college in Ops on Saturn, had taken graduate courses in Solar System University on Earth, and then had established a laboratory on wild, lonely little Ariel.

Skal Kar had hired guards to maintain the electrified stockade which protected his laboratory from the



ferocious monsters of the moon. But these guards had never known the nature of their employer's work.

"There's no clue in this to Skal Kar's research," rasped Simon.

"No, but there's a possible lead," Captain Future declared. "Skal Kar took a graduate course at Solar System University, here in New York, before going out there to Ariel for secret research. If we knew what he studied at the University here, it might give us a pointer."

"Say, that's a thought!" Joan Randall exclaimed. "Do you want me to go over and check up Skal Kar's record at the University?"

"I'll go myself," Curt answered. "While I'm gone, I want you to make

out a complete list of the things taken by Quorn's band in his raids on Pluto and Neptune and that space-freighter."

He tossed his belt and proton pistol to Otho.

"Keep these till I get back. I can't very well walk into the University wearing them."

IT was late morning when Curt Government Tower and started across the metropolis toward the University. None of the crowds that jammed the moving sidewalks recognized the most famous adventurer in the System in this tall, red-headed young man in the green zipper-suit. Captain Future was known to few people by sight. And he had taken care to turn inside his palm the emblem-ring he wore on his left hand. That ring, whose nine "planet-jewels" slowly revolved around a central glowing "Sun-jewel," was his identifying badge through the system.

The lofty skyscrapers of Solar System University towered out of a small green park. Into the buildings was pouring a cheerful, chattering horde of students of every planetary nationality, for this University was the great center of learning to which came the youth of all planets for graduate courses.

Curt Newton entered the registrar's office and asked for the record of Skal Kar. He studied it for a moment. The young Saturnian scientist had specialized in courses in dimensional physics and relativity mechanics. Most of his courses had been under Professor Felix Warrenden, a well known authority on the higher branches of physics.

"Warrenden may be able to tell me what Skal Kar was up to," Curt muttered thoughtfully. "Let's see—where's his lecture-room?"

He located it in the towering Physics Building. A glowing sign outside the chamber announced that sharply on the hour would begin Professor Warrenden's lecture on "Entropy and the Cosmic Constants." Newton was jostled by a crowd of blithe young students as he entered

the big lecture-room. He grinned as he heard their chatter.

"Here we go for another two hours of torture," one Venusian student was saying ruefully. "He'll pour the super-equations on us today."

Captain Future quietly pushed through the crowd of students who were hastily taking their seats and approached the man standing on the platform.

Professor Felix Warrenden was a withered-faced, waspish little Earthman who stood scowling at his students through thick-lensed spectacles.

Curt Newton approached him.

"I'd like to see you for a moment, Professor."

"Later, young man, later," barked the little savant. "Can't you see it's time for my lecture to begin?"

"But this is very important," Curt persisted.

Professor Warrenden replied angrily.

"Will you take your seat and stop bothering me, young man?"

Curt saw that the scientist mistook him for one of the students. He hesitated. He didn't want to declare publicly that he was Captain Future. He liked to keep his activities as secret as possible.

"Didn't you hear me? Take your seat!" snapped the scientist.

Curt resigned himself to waiting. He descended from the rostrum and took an empty chair among the other students.

Professor Warrenden swept the crowded room with his formidable stare. The buzzing students hastily became quiet. Their awe of their waspish teacher was obvious.

"Today," began the little scientist, "I shall continue my discussion of the relation of the cosmic constants to entropy. The value of the first cosmical constant, being in inverse proportion to the cube root of the second constant—"

Curt Newton saw worried frowns of concentration on the faces of all the students about him as they sought to follow the complicated discussion. To Curt himself, the equations Warrenden was reeling off were child's play, elementary stuff.

SUDDENLY Captain Future chuckled under his breath. An idea which appealed to his sense of humor had just come to him.

"Brings us to the fundamental Second Law of Thermodynamics," Professor Warrenden was saying. "This law is a basic and unshakable tenet of science."

Curt Newton promptly interrupted by putting up his hand.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but you are mistaken on that," he said calmly.

There was a dead hush. The crowd of students all looked at Curt in astonishment. They thought him a fellow-student. No one ever dreamed of a mere pupil daring to dispute Warrenden's assertions.

Professor Warrenden himself seemed unable to believe his ears. He peered down at Curt, blinking incredulously.

"What was that you said, young man?" he demanded.

Curt smiled. "I just said that you were quite wrong in your last statement. The Second Law of Thermodynamics is a fallacy."

Warrenden's withered countenance seemed to freeze. His eyes glared down at Curt through his thick spectacles, as though to blast the rash red-headed young man with a look. Then the professor exploded.

"This," he explained, "is too much! I thought that after all these years I could not see more stupid, brainless students than I have been teaching. But I was wrong. This brash young man, who blandly challenges one of the most basic laws of science, tops everything yet!"

Curt kept his face straight.

"I only wanted to put you right on the matter, Professor."

"You wanted to put *me* right?" gasped Warrenden. "That is very handsome of you, young man. I appreciate it. Suppose you elucidate to my slow brain exactly why the Second Law of Thermodynamics is a fallacy?"

"Why, sure, Professor—I'll do that, to help you out," Captain Future replied, rising to his feet with an assumed, cock-sure smile on his face.

"Matter melts always into the lower form of radiation, according to the Second Law," Curt stated. "But the process is reversible. The proof of this lies in the following equations—"

Captain Future ran through the super-complex mathematical formulae briefly. And Professor Warrenden, who had been waiting to blast him for his presumption when he finished, looked more and more astonished.

Curt soon finished his exposition. The other students waited expectantly for their instructor to unloose his thunders. Instead, Professor Warrenden was gazing at Curt, eyes popping in bewilderment.

"Why, your formulae are mathematically sound!" Warrenden gasped. "But I can't understand this! Surely a young student can't have succeeded in shattering the Second Law of Thermodynamics. You must repeat those equations again for me."

Warrenden turned for a moment to the gaping students.

"Class dismissed!" he barked. "There will be no lecture today."

The wondering students filed out,

[Turn page]

HITS THE SPOT

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Otho

looking back astonishedly at Curt Newton. When they had gone, Warrenden turned eagerly to Curt.

"Now go through those equations again, young man!"

"Some other time, Professor," smiled Curt Newton. "Right now, I've some things to ask you. They're important."

As he spoke, Curt held out his hand with palm up, to show the "planet-ring" emblem he kept concealed inside his fingers.

"Captain Future!" gasped Warrenden, his eyes bulging. "Good Heavens, I've been lecturing the greatest scientist in the System! No wonder you were able to challenge the Second Law!"

"It was just a joke, and I hope you don't mind it," Curt grinned. "But I really do need your help badly, Professor."

"What can I do?" the little scientist asked earnestly.

"A few years ago you had a graduate student named Skal Kar, a young Saturnian," Curt stated. "He's been

murdered, and I'm trying to get information about him."

WARRENDEN started. "Skal Kar murdered? That's too bad. He was one of the most promising pupils I ever had."

"Just what branch of higher science did Skal Kar specialize in here?" Captain Future asked.

"In fifth-dimensional physics," was the answer. "He was intensely interested in the supposed co-existing universe."

"The co-existing universe?" Curt Newton repeated. His eyes narrowed. A flash of enlightenment had seared across his mind.

"Why, yes," Warrenden replied. "Certainly you know that modern physical science shows there is another four-dimensional universe that co-exists with our own universe, coinciding with ours along the four dimensions of length, breadth, thickness and time, but separated from ours along the *fifth dimension*?"

"Yes, I know the theory and the evidence that supports it," Curt answered. "So Skal Kar was interested in the co-existing universe?"

"He was utterly engrossed by it," was the reply. "He studied everything ever learned about it, especially the experiments of Harris Haines."

"Harris Haines?" Curt repeated keenly. "I seem to remember that name. Wasn't he an Earthman physicist of a generation ago?"

"That's right," nodded Warrenden. "Harris Haines was either a very great scientist or a cheap faker—many people think the latter."

"I remember now," Curt muttered thoughtfully. "Haines was the man who claimed he had actually entered the co-existing universe."

"That's the man," Warrenden said. "Haines claimed he had thrust a small ship across the fifth-dimensional gulf and thus had entered the co-existing universe. He said it was a universe of space and stars just like our own. And he claimed he was going back into it. He disappeared a little later and no one ever knew what became of him."

"I see," Curt muttered. His mind

was racing. "You've helped me a lot, Professor. Please keep my visit and questions secret, will you?"

"Don't worry," answered Warren-den ruefully. "I've no desire to let my students know it was Captain Future I was lecturing!"

Curt hurried back to Government Tower. He found the Futuremen and Joan and Ezra and Halk Anders anxiously awaiting him.

"We couldn't get any line on N'Rala's movements at all," Joan reported. "But we did get this list of the things Ul Quorn has stolen."

"What did you find out, lad?" the Brain asked Captain Future.

"Plenty, I think," Curt answered. "This fellow Skal Kar whom N'Rala may have murdered was studying the co-existing universe."

The Brain uttered a metallic exclamation. And the other two Futuremen also seemed to grasp instantly the significance of the news. But Ezra Gurney and Joan and the Commander looked puzzled.

"A co-existin' universe?" Ezra repeated. "I don't get it. How can two universes occupy the same space at the same time?"

Curt explained. "Two three-dimensional objects can occupy the same space—at different times. They're separated along time, the fourth dimension. In the same way, two objects can occupy the same space at the same time when separated from each other along the *fifth* dimension. That's how that other universe can co-exist with ours in time and space."

EZRA scratched his head. "Sounds simple, the way you tell it. But what's it got to do with our catchin' that devil Ul Quorn?"

"It may have a lot to do with it," Curt promised grimly. He had come to a rapid decision. "We're going out to that moon of Uranus where Skal Kar was murdered, and investigate it. I think the trail that will lead us to Ul Quorn begins there."

He turned to Joan and Ezra.

"I want you two to stay here on Earth long enough to gather all the information you can about Harris Haines, the physicist. Then come

after us in a fast Patrol cruiser—I'll meet you in the city Lulanee, on Uranus."

Though they did not understand the motives for his request, the girl agent and the old veteran nodded quickly. "We'll be there!"

Ten minutes later the *Comet* rose from the little deck atop Government Tower and shot into the sky like a projectile launched from a giant catapult.

Grag held the controls. Eek, his moon-pup pet, clawed with strange excitement at the robot's arm. Eek could make no sounds, since his species communicated by telepathy.



Grag

"Miss me while I was gone, Eek?" Grag fondly asked the moon-pup.

As the *Comet* roared out from Earth into the black vault of space toward the far green spark of Uranus, Curt was talking to Simon and Otho.

"Simon, suppose Skal Kar was trying to duplicate Harris Haines' feat of entering the co-existing universe? Suppose Skal Kar found the secret of doing so—and that his secret was taken from him by N'Rala?"

"Holy sun-imps!" swore Otho. "You mean that that may be Quorn's new power—a power to shift in and out of the co-existing universe?"

"It's possible," Captain Future answered soberly. "We won't know for sure until we've investigated Skal Kar's laboratory on Ariel."

They were interrupted by a low, excited whisper from Grag.

"Chief, Eek has been trying to tell me something telepathically," Grag breathed. "Somebody is hiding in that tool-locker."

The Futuremen looked instantly at the tall locker in the side of the main cabin, in which were stored their larger atomic tools.

"Someone hiding in there?" snapped Otho. "It's one of Ul Quorn's men, then! That devil is striking at us again!"

CHAPTER V

Moon of Mystery



CURT NEWTON'S proton pistol flashed into his hand.

"Stand ready!" he murmured tautly. "I'm going to open that locker."

He advanced soundlessly. Then, with a sudden swift movement,

he flung open the big locker. A figure pitched out of it.

"Why, it's an Earth boy!" exclaimed Otho incredulously.

Curt burst into laughter. "A young stowaway!"

It was a boy about fourteen years old, clad in soiled, shapeless black zipper suit. He was a wiry, scrawny youngster with a tough, belligerent face and black eyes wise and cynical beyond his years.

He stood facing them in resolute bravado, his fists clenched. Yet under his hard-boiled pose, nervousness was visible. He gulped as his eyes swept over the awesome group facing him.

"Who are you, and what are you doing in the *Comet*?" Curt Newton demanded.

The youngster answered nonchalantly.

"I'm Johnny Kirk, see? And I hid out in this boat because I wanted to

join up with you and your gang. I want to be a Futureman."

Grag uttered a booming sound of mirth.

"Look what wants to be a Futureman!"

Johnny Kirk scowled at the great robot.

"Don't you laugh at me, you big hunk of iron. I'm liable to put the blast on you."

Captain Future chuckled.

"Now don't go bullying Grag," he admonished. "How in the world did you get into the *Comet*?"

"Aw, that was easy," the tough youngster answered nonchalantly. "I ain't got no folks and I pick up a living running errands around Government Tower, see? And I always keep my eyes peeled so I'll spot your ship if it ever comes. For I decided to join up with you. I've heard all about the swell jobs you and these guys have pulled."

Curt kept his face straight.

"Nice of you to say that, Johnny. But why didn't you try to get into the Planet Patrol Academy, instead?"

"The Planet Patrol? Them sissies?" echoed Johnny Kirk scornfully. "Say, they're a bunch of dressed-up creampuffs. It's you and the Futuremen that really have the adventures. And you're the only guy I'd ever take orders from, Captain Future."

Curt Newton saw the hero worship in the tough youngster's eyes, and was a little touched.

"You still haven't told us how you got into the *Comet*," he said.

"It was a cinch," retorted Johnny. "This morning I spotted this ship of yours landing on the top of Government Tower. It was the chance I was waiting for, so I went right up to it."

"You couldn't get through the Planet Police and President's offices on the top floors," declared Otho incredulously.

"Don't I know that?" retorted Johnny Kirk. "So I go up to the floor just under them, pretending I'm bringing a message, and then I slip out the window and shinny up the outside wall with these 'climbers.'"

The boy took from his pocket a set of four flat rubberoid *vacuum-caps*, designed to be strapped to wrists and

knees and often utilized by burglars for climbing sheer outside walls.

"Where'd you get these things?" Curt Newton demanded.

Johnny grinned.

"I won a kit of burglar tools, gambling by the spaceport docks with a Martian burglar. Figured I might need it some time. These folding vacuum-cup 'climbers' are part of that burglar-kit. They got me up the wall to the Tower top, and it was easy then to slip into the ship and hide out in that locker."

"Blast me down!" swore Otho incredulously. "Can you figure this kid climbing up that wall like that? I'd hate to do it myself!"

"What are we going to do with him?" boomed Grag. "We don't want to go all the way back to Earth with him."

"No," rasped the Brain impatiently. "We've no time to lose in this fight against Quorn."

CURT NEWTON shrugged, with assumed rueful expression.

"Guess there's nothing to do but toss him out into space, boys," he declared.

Johnny Kirk wasn't scared. The tough youngster gave Curt a wise, knowing grin.

"Aw, you can't kid me, Captain Future. You wouldn't do that. I know all about you, see? Since I was a kid down by the space-docks, I've been reading and hearing everything they tell about you."

Curt laughed. "Okay, Johnny—you stay aboard. When we get to Uranus, we'll have to turn you over to the Police for return to Earth."

"Aw, you don't have to do that, do you?" pleaded the youngster. "I'd make a swell Futureman. Give me one of them atom guns to use and I'll show you I can blast 'em down."

"Bloodthirsty little devil, isn't he?" commented Otho. "Come on, my embryo-Futureman, you can help me in my experiment. I need someone to hand me tools."

Grag grunted in disgust.

"So you're going on with your wacky scientific work, eh? I bet it'll be good."

"You'll soon have your curiosity gratified, Grag," grinned the android

as he started to take his metal pieces from a cabinet.

The *Comet* throbbed on out through the solar spaces for hour after hour, toward the distant green spot that was Uranus. Finally Otho completed the work that had engrossed his spare time for many days.

"All done, Johnny," he told the tough youngster. "You can put those tools back in the locker."

"Say, what is this thing you've made?" Johnny Kirk demanded.

"Yes, what is this great scientific achievement you've been talking about?" asked Curt Newton, who had come over to them now.

The thing Otho had made was a crazy-looking little tin mannikin three feet high, with grotesque, round arms and legs and a bucket-like tin head in which were two staring artificial eyes.

"Goofy-looking, isn't it?" Otho chuckled. "It's got a little atomic power-plant in it, and a voice that speaks from records."

"But what's the idea of this wacky automaton?" Curt demanded.

"You remember that time Grag gave me a ribbing by pretending to make an android like me out of mud and old oil?"

Captain Future grinned.

"Sure, I remember. The old boy sort of put it over you, that time."

"Well, here's where I pay him back," Otho declared. "Watch!"

Otho touched certain switches on the back of his goofy little tin-headed automaton. A humming of power came from within the little tin figure. It started to move, walking stiffly on its grotesque legs. It walked straight forward to the control-room where Grag sat in the pilot chair. The tin mannikin stopped beside Grag, looked up at the robot with staring artificial eyes, and then spoke in its mechanical record-voice.

"Papa!" it cried, in a loud, rusty voice.

Grag, thunderstruck with amazement, stared down at the little bucket-headed tin figure that was claiming him as its parent.

"Papa, don't you know me?" cried the small tin figure in its rusty voice. "I'm Grag, Junior—your little sonny boy!"

Grag nearly fell out of the pilot chair with astonishment. The big robot could hardly find his voice.

"What in the name of space—"

"Papa, I'll never leave you now that I've found you!" the tin mannikin was declaiming shrilly. "You may be just a mess of rusty old iron, but you're all the family I've got!"

Grag looked wildly around. Then, as he saw Curt shaking with silent laughter and Otho doubled up with glee, he began to understand. He snatched up the declaiming tin mannikin and inspected it. A brief glance was enough to show Grag the record inside that was speaking.

He hurled "Grag, Junior" at Otho, with a roar of rage. Otho, helpless with mirth, just managed to duck the flying mass of tin.

"You cursed rubber imitation of humanity!" yelled Grag at the android. "I'll get you for that joke! You just wait!"

Otho was choking with laughter. "I'll—never forget as long as I lived how Grag looked when that thing cried Papa!" he gasped.

The *Comet* flew on and on. Uranus showed a small green disk ahead, and they could clearly see the four bright specks of its satellites. Young Johnny Kirk gazed dismally at the planet from beside Curt's pilot-chair.

EEYOU'RE not really going to turn me over to the sky-cops at Uranus, are you?" he begged Curt hopefully. "Aw, have a heart, Captain Future! I'd make a swell Futureman once I've learned some science from you."

Curt Newton grinned.

"I believe you, Johnny. But we've got to drop you. We're going into a struggle that's too dangerous for any youngster. Besides," he added consolingly, "before we leave you at Uranus we're visiting its moon, Ariel. You'll get a look at that wild little world."

"Wild is right," grunted Grag, over Curt's shoulder. "That Skal Kar who built a laboratory there must have been crazy to pick that monster-ridden moon."

"Skal Kar had his reasons, I'm certain," Curt said thoughtfully.

Uranus soon bulked as a great, cloudy green sphere in the starry heavens. Captain Future expertly swung the *Comet* in around the darker, little globe of Ariel, the innermost moon. Soon they heard a whistling shriek outside the ship as it penetrated the atmosphere of the satellite.

"Skal Kar's laboratory is around on the night side now," Curt Newton muttered, peering down at the moon.

The nighted landscape of Ariel, illuminated by the soft green planet-glow of the great sphere overhead, was forbidding. As the *Comet* flew low over the green-lit jungle, they could make out strange, swarming creatures. They were nearly all of one species—shapeless white masses of flesh that flowed through the vegetation with a gliding jelly-like movement that required no limbs.

"There they are—the devilish things that give this place the name of Monster Moon," Otho told young Johnny Kirk.

"Aw, they don't look so tough," declared Johnny skeptically. "They're so slow I could put the blast on 'em before they got near me."

"You think so, do you?" Otho retorted. "You'd find out different. Those gas-beasts, as they're called, have a very effective weapon. It's a stupefying gas they generate inside their bodies and jet out for a hundred feet or more to overcome their prey."

Captain Future uttered a relieved exclamation.

"Ah, there's what we're looking for—Skal Kar's stockade."

Ahead yawned a thousand-foot clearing that had been hacked from the jungle. It was surrounded by a wire stockade, to which were connected cables from a squat atomic electric-generator. The generator kept the wire stockade charged, and the gliding white gas-beasts that swarmed outside dared not approach it.

At the center of the clearing loomed the mysterious laboratory of the murdered scientist. It was a black cement tower, windowless, cylindrical in shape. Curt brought the *Comet* down to an expert landing inside the stockade. He cut the cycs, then rose to his feet.

"Looks like the place is deserted," he told the Futuremen, "but we'll take no chances. Be ready for a scrap in there."

Otho had the airlock door open. Johnny Kirk started out with them, but Captain Future held him back.

"Not you, Johnny. You stay here — we may meet trouble in there. If



Captain Future aimed with deliberate care at the onrushing monster (Chap. VIII)

you want to help, remain here and watch the *Comet*."

"Okay, Chief," replied Johnny a little reluctantly. "If anybody comes fooling around our ship, I'll let 'em have it."

Otho chuckled as he and Grag and

the Brain started with Captain Future across the clearing toward the looming black tower.

"Our ship, eh?" laughed the android. "He's a Futureman already, to hear him talk."

Curt grinned. "I like that youngster, in spite of his tough talk. There's good stuff in him."

They approached the black tower. The only opening in it was a square chromium door. It was locked, but Captain Future fished an "all-wave" master vibration-key from his belt-kit that soon opened it. They entered a Stygian darkness, their hands ready upon their weapons. Groping about, Curt soon found the switch of the tower's krypton-lights.

The blue radiance disclosed a bewildering interior. The whole lower two-thirds of the tower was a single enormous room. It had been the laboratory of Skal Kar. An array of scientific instruments, generators and reference books crowded the walls of the circular chamber.

BUT the central part of the big room was empty, except for a curious low framework of very heavy metal stanchions. It was only a few feet high, but was more than eighty feet long.

Curt Newton's eyes fastened on it instantly.

"See that framework, Simon?" he muttered. "Our guess was right."

"What the devil was your guess?" Otho demanded puzzledly. "What was this Skal Kar doing here?"

"Building a small space ship," Captain Future retorted. "That low framework was the cradle upon which his little ship rested in building."

"You're joking!" Otho protested incredulously. "Who in the Sun's name would be crazy enough to build a space ship inside this cement tower? How would he ever get it out? I just can't understand it."

"How did the ship that rescued Ul Quorn get in and out of Cerberus prison?" Captain Future countered meaningfully. "It was this same little ship, built here by Skal Kar and stolen by N'Rala. A ship capable of shifting across the fifth-dimensional gulf into the co-existing universe!"

"Jumping jungle-cats of Jupiter!" gasped Otho. "Then that is the secret of Ul Quorn's power to vanish and reappear at will?"

"I still don't understand how it's possible, Chief," said Grag.

"It's simple enough, Grag," the red-haired planeteer told him. "That other universe of space and stars is co-existent with our own universe of space and stars, but doesn't impinge on ours because they're separated by the fifth-dimensional abyss. But Skal Kar's ship could cross that abyss into the other universe. N'Rala, after she killed Skal Kar, simply shifted the little ship into the other universe, traveled a short distance in the space of that other universe, and then shifted back and reappeared at a different location which was in our own universe."

"Aye, lad, there's no doubt in my mind now that that's it," rasped the hovering Brain. "The Martian girl must have coaxed Skal Kar into showing her how his apparatus worked before she killed him."

"But how can we catch Ul Quorn when he has this power to flee into the other universe?" cried Otho anxiously.

"We can't follow him into the other universe—unless we have a ship with the same power," Captain Future admitted.

HE started a close search of the deserted laboratory. The atomic tools in it were of the highly ingenious type used for space-ship manufacture. With them one man could easily construct a small ship.

Curt peered into two big, empty lead bins. He figured a trace of shining blue powder that still remained in them.

"Radite," he said shortly. "The most powerful cyclotron-fuel known. He'd need such super-power to activate his dimension-shifting ship."

"Aye, and that's probably why he had his laboratory here on Uranus' moon," said the Brain keenly. "Radite is only found on Uranus."

Curt searched Skal Kar's papers, hunting for the plans and diagrams of the murdered scientist's dimension-

shifting craft. But the papers had been ransacked, and all plans were missing.

"Here's Skal Kar's diary!" Grag boomed suddenly. "I found it among the books over there."

CAPTAIN FUTURE eagerly inspected the diary. He was disappointed that it contained no scientific notes or plans about Skal Kar's ship. But he found one entry revealing, and read it aloud.

Began actual work on the ship today. If this small model craft succeeds in entering the co-existent universe, I'll be able to build a larger ship of greater cruising radius. Then at last I'll be able to seek in that other universe for the great treasure that Harris Haines saw there. And I'll succeed in getting that treasure, where Haines failed!

Curt looked up, his eyes gleaming. "So when Harris Haines went back into the other universe, it was to get some great treasure he'd seen there?" he muttered. "And he never came back. But Skal Kar knew about it from Haines' papers, and was planning to go after it himself."

"But Quorn had Skal Kar killed, and now has his and Harris Haines' secret papers!" Otho burst out. "And I'll bet a planet that—"

"That Ul Quorn's planning to go after that mysterious treasure in the other universe himself!" Captain Future finished. "Of course! He—"

Grag suddenly interrupted. His sensitive microphone-ears had detected a distant sound.

"I hear a ship landing outside!" he cried.

Like a flying shadow, Captain Future darted to the door with the others close behind him.

He flung open the door, then uttered a cry.

"Quorn's ship!"

A small, sleek-lined space ship had landed softly close beside the *Comet* in the green-lit clearing.

And a giant Jovian, a Martian and a fat Earthman were rushing toward the unguarded door of the ship of the Futuremen.

"They're going to steal the *Comet*!" yelled Captain Future.

CHAPTER VI

Radite Trail



CURT plunged forward with a yell, his proton pistol flashing in his hand. But he knew, even as he and the Futuremen started, that they were too late to intercept the three men racing for the *Comet*.

A wiry little figure suddenly tumbled out of the ship, confronting the three criminals with a leveled proton gun. It was tough young Johnny Kirk. He fired the weapon, and its thin blue ray dropped the Martian in his tracks.

"Good work, kid!" yelled Otho exultantly. "We're coming!" The Futuremen couldn't shoot, for Johnny was between them and the criminals.

The remaining two criminals, the giant Jovian and fat Earthman, heard the yell and they turned and saw the Futuremen rushing toward them. Hastily the two criminals turned and plunged back to their own ship. Young Johnny Kirk ran valourously after them, brandishing his weapon.

"Stay back, Johnny!" Curt cried hastily. "Don't—"

His warning came too late. The audacious youngster had pursued the two outlaws right to the door of their craft. They turned on him suddenly, and the giant Jovian knocked his weapon aside before he could fire.

Neither Captain Future nor the Futuremen dared pull trigger for fear of hitting the youngster. As they lunged forward, they saw the great Jovian fell Johnny with a blow that sent the Earth lad reeling into the open door of the criminals' ship. The door of that little ship slammed shut, and with a screaming roar of rocket-tubes it zoomed up from the clearing into the planet-light.

"After them!" Otho yelled furiously. "They've got the kid, blast them!"

"If he hadn't been so crazy daring,

it wouldn't have happened!" Grag boomed. "When he followed them back to their ship, they grabbed him for a hostage. They know we can't attack them now."

"We're going after them nevertheless!" Captain Future cried.

He and the Futuremen were piling into the *Comet* by this time. Curt leaped into the pilot-chair, flicked the cyc-switch. He jammed the cyc-pedal to the floor and pulled the space-stick back. With a bursting roar of rocket-tubes, the ship climbed skyward.

Up into the green glow of great Uranus they roared, after the fleeing ship of the criminals. They were high above the moon Ariel by now, and the *Comet* was swiftly overtaking the fleeing craft ahead. But at this moment an amazing phenomenon occurred.

The fugitive ship of the criminals suddenly vanished from sight ahead. One moment it was clearly in view—the next moment, it was gone as though it had never existed.

"Hell-hounds of Venus!" raved Otho furiously. "They've given us a clean slip!"

It was the truth. Though Captain Future kept the *Comet* circling space for minutes, there was no sign anywhere of their quarry.

"Quorn's vanishing ship!" Curt gritted, tingling with anger. "It's gone, and we can't follow it. All they had to do was to shift it into the co-existing universe, and then laugh at our pursuit."

"There's no doubt now that that is the secret of Quorn's ship—the power to enter the other universe," Simon rasped thoughtfully.

"Not a doubt in the world," Curt agreed bitterly. "They'll travel safely through the space of that other universe for a distance, and then shift back into our own universe—millions of miles from here."

"Aren't we going to do anything about it?" sputtered Otho.

"Calm down, Otho," Curt advised, repressing his own anger. "We won't accomplish anything by dashing around space like a runaway meteor."

"But they've got young Johnny a

prisoner!" Otho exclaimed. "I liked that youngster."

"So did I," Curt Newton said. "They'll pay for it if they harm the boy. But that's got to come later. Our task now is to find Ul Quorn. He and his band must have a secret base somewhere."

"My guess is that it's around Uranus," rasped the Brain. "And that Quorn gave orders to set a little trap here for us."

NEWTON nodded thoughtfully. "It looks like it. Quorn's clever. He would figure that we'd be here sooner or later, following his trail. So he had some of his men waiting in that ship. I think they meant to steal the *Comet* and then blast open the stockade—let the gas-beasts in on us. We couldn't escape, and it would have wiped us out."

A queer light danced in Captain Future's gray eyes.

"I'll say this for Ul Quorn—he's a foeman worthy of our steel. But we conquered him before and we will again!"

Curt brought the *Comet* back down to a landing inside the stockade. He was not yet finished with his investigation there.

He and the Futuremen first examined the dead Martian criminal whom Johnny Kirk had killed in his intrepid defense of the *Comet*. They found nothing remarkable on his body, except a trace of shining blue dust which Captain Future noticed in his pockets and cuffs.

"That blue dust is radite," Curt muttered. "This man has been somewhere recently working with the mineral."

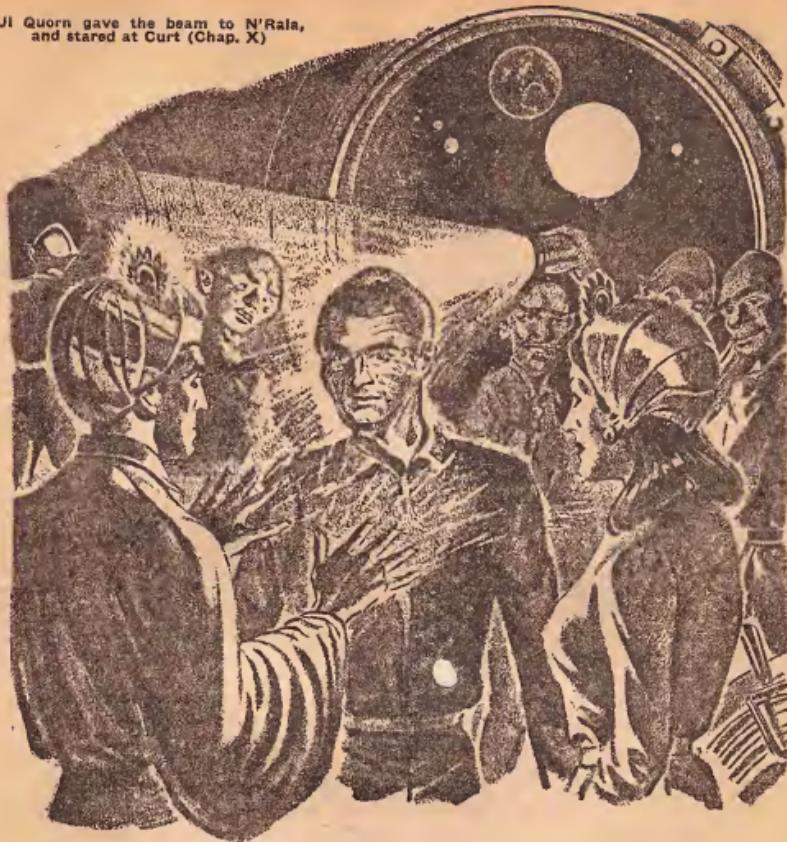
He looked up at the Brain, who was hovering beside him.

"It all checks up, Simon. Quorn is amassing a stock of radite, the super-powered cyclotron fuel. And Quorn is either building or planning to build a larger dimension-shifting space ship that will have great power and cruising radius."

"Hold on, Chief!" Otho interrupted brashly. "How do you know Quorn's building a bigger ship?"

Captain Future shrugged.

Ul Quorn gave the beam to N'Rala,
and stared at Curt (Chap. X)



"By using my wits, as you ought to now and then," Curt replied caustically. He took a paper from his pocket. "This is the list of objects stolen by Quorn's band in their raids, as reported by Ezra. The list includes six massive super-cyclotrons, a mass of high-test alloy bars, and a number of atomic machine tools used in ship construction.

"Those are the chief materials and tools which would be required for construction of a larger and more powerful space ship," Curt Newton continued keenly. "The conclusion is inescapable that Ul Quorn has some secret base at which he plans to build such a ship. In that ship, fueled with radite, Quorn and his band will go into the co-existing universe in search of the mysterious treasure Harris

Haines told about."

"Good reasoning, lad," approved the Brain. "I believe now we're getting somewhere."

"Hanged if I can see it yet," Otho objected. "Why should Quorn have to build a larger ship to go on this treasure hunt in the other universe? Why not just use the little ship they stole from Skal Kar, the ship they're using now? That craft can enter the other universe."

"That puzzled me at first," Captain Future admitted, "but I believe I've figured the answer. Suppose, once they shift into the other universe, the treasure they're after is a long way off in space? A small craft such as Skal Kar's model couldn't travel any vast distance in the space of the other universe, any more than it could here."

They'd have to have a larger ship with a vastly greater cruising radius, one that could hold more fuel."

"But, Chief," Otho asked, "what the devil is this mysterious treasure they're after?"

"I wish I knew," Curt said thoughtfully. "It must be something big. Ul Quorn doesn't play for small stakes."

Captain Future rose decisively to his feet.

"But there's nothing more we can learn here. We've got to run down Ul Quorn before he departs into the other universe."

"You talk about running down Ul Quorn as though all we had to do was walk in on him and grab him," muttered Otho gloomily. "How in space can we track him when he ducks in and out of the other universe?"

"Don't be so cursed dismal, Otho," Captain Future reprimed. "As I see it, we've got two angles to follow on this thing. One, we've got to see if we can't locate the secret base where Ul Quorn is building his bigger ship. Two, we must equip the *Comet* with dimension-thrust apparatus so we can follow Quorn into the other universe."

"How're we going to fit up the *Comet* like that when we don't have Skal Kar's plans for the apparatus, as Quorn does?" Otho objected.

"Simon and I know the principle of the dimension-thrust," Curt told him. "Don't you remember our experiments back home on the Moon last year? We can build apparatus that will shift the *Comet* across dimensions. But first, we want to locate Ul Quorn's secret workshop and base."

"It must be on Uranus," Curt went on keenly. "Quorn will need a lot of radite to power his treasure-search in the other universe. And in the whole Solar System, radite's found only on Uranus. We're blasting there at once, to hunt around the radite sources for Quorn's base!"

SOON the *Comet* was zooming up from Ariel and roaring toward the vast, greenish globe of Uranus.

"Head for Lulanee, the capital city," Curt ordered Otho, who had taken the pilot-chair. "It's on the night side now."

Presently their ship was screaming down into the deep atmosphere of the seventh world. Beneath lay the moonlit, mountainous landscape of Uranus. It was well named the Mountain World, for it was rugged with labyrinthine-linked ranges of lofty peaks. Some of the ranges, like the Mystery Mountains that loomed far in the north, actually towered more than twenty miles into the clouds.

The *Comet* screamed southward over the equatorial Endless River that belts the mid-section of the planet. It was a foaming river that roared ceaselessly around the planet in the titanic canyon it had eroded for itself, its current being the result of tidal pull of the four moons. Then they came within sight of the Shining Sea.

Towering black mountains cupped a great sea whose waters glowed like an uncanny ocean of curdled white light. Those shining waters held in suspension a large amount of glowing radioactive minerals, causing a radiance. Their luminous waves lapped against the encircling black cliffs, breaking into showering sprays of living light.

Amid the mountains on the northern shore of the Shining Sea brooded the ancient capital city of Lulanee. It was a monolithic metropolis whose black-domed buildings and streets and docks had been carved from the solid rock. Its lighted streets and arcades were thronged with the pleasure-seeking population. Out on the glowing sea drifted the pleasure-barges of the richer Uranians, like dark boats on a fairy ocean.

"I always did think Lulanee was the most beautiful city in the System, at night," commented Otho, drinking in the weird beauty.

Curt Newton nodded.

"Land at the Police station," he ordered.

The luminous shooting-star emblem on the domed roof of the Planet Police station identified its location. The *Comet* dropped on its keel tubes into the landing-court behind the building. Here were parked fast cruisers of the Planet Patrol, swift Tarks and Rissmans.

A vice-marshall of the Planet Police,

an alert young Venusian, came running out to meet Curt and the Futuremen as they emerged from their ship into the krypton-lit court.

Curt held out his identifying "nine-planet" ring. The young officer smiled eagerly.

"As though I didn't know your ship and the Futuremen without that, Captain Future! What can we do for you here?"

"I'm after someone who needs a lot of radite," Curt stated crisply, "and I hope to trace him in that way. The man I'm after is a criminal. He wouldn't dare negotiate for the radite with the mine companies here. Is there any other source of radite on Uranus besides the established mines?"



The Brain

"No reachable source," the Venusian replied. "Radite is known to exist at one point far down in the great caves below the surface, but nobody has ever been able to obtain it from those endless depths."

The young officer was referring to the labyrinthine caverns which honey-combed the mass of Uranus to unguessable depths—the most extensive caves in any of the nine worlds. But Grag did not understand.

"If no one's ever been able to reach the radite down there in the caves, how do you know it's there?" the big robot demanded.

"Radite is so powerfully radioactive that its emanations affect sensitive instruments at a great distance," the officer explained. "Such instruments show a rich radite deposit far underground, north of here."

"And no attempt's ever been made to get at that deposit?" Captain Future demanded.

"Plenty of attempts were made at first, but all failed," he was told. "You see, the only way to that deep-buried deposit would be through the great caverns. And the ferocious cave-creatures and the People of Darkness who inhabit that maze of lightless spaces, attack any intruder. After many attempts, all efforts to reach the deep deposit were abandoned."

Captain Future's gray eyes had a startled gleam in them. He turned to the Brain who hovered beside him.

"Simon, suppose Ul Quorn has reached that radite deposit down there? Suppose Quorn's secret base is down in the great caves?"

"I believe you've hit it, lad," muttered the Brain. "Quorn must have a large mass of radite fuel if he's to enter the other universe in a larger ship. And that buried deposit in the deep caves is the only place where he could get it. Probably he's building his new ship down there!"

"That's a goofy theory," Otho objected. "How would Quorn and his band get down into that cave, if nobody has ever managed to reach it?"

"Quorn could enter the cave easily," Curt retorted. "He'd simply switch his little ship into the other universe, travel to a point in it corresponding to the location of the cave in our universe, and then switch back across the dimensional gulf. Then his ship would be inside the cavern!"

"Well, we can do the same thing as soon as we fit up the *Comet* with dimension-thrust apparatus!" Otho exclaimed triumphantly.

"That's not soon enough," snapped Captain Future. "It'll take days to build a dimension-thrust mechanism capable of shifting the *Comet* into the other universe. By that time, Quorn will probably have his new ship built and will be gone into the other universe for the treasure."

CURT'S face lengthened.

"And I think that treasure is something that will give Quorn great powers once he gets it. He wouldn't be after it so keenly if it weren't so. We may not be able to cope with Quorn if he secures the mysterious treasure!"

Otho scratched his head.

"That's right. But I don't see what we can do but take the chance. We have to take time to fit up the *Comet*."

"We don't all have to," Curt declared. His eyes gleamed with purpose. "Simon, you could build the dimension-thruster, couldn't you?"

"Yes, I could," answered the Bain. "I have a full record of our experiments on the subject, in our microfilm reference library."

"Good!" Curt exclaimed. "I'm going to leave you and Otho here to build the machine. Meanwhile, I'm going with Grag to try to penetrate directly to Quorn's cavern base, and make sure he doesn't get away. Grag and I will attempt to go down through the caves to that radite cavern."

The young Venusian officer made strenuous protest. "Don't try it, Captain Future! Nobody has ever succeeded in getting past the creatures in those deeper caves!"

"We'll have a few wrinkles most of the explorers didn't have," Curt retorted. "We've got to make it. As soon as you have the *Comet* fitted, Simon, you and Otho can follow us by the fifth-dimension short-cut."

"Say, do you think you're going to leave me here while you take Grag off on a jaunt?" cried Otho rebelliously. "Not much!"

Curt saw mutiny brewing. He had his own reasons for wanting Grag as his companion on this venture instead of Otho. To prevent the inevitable argument, he took Otho aside and spoke to him in a low voice.

"You've got to stay, Otho," he whispered. "Grag wouldn't be any good helping Simon with the dimension-thruster. Grag's faithful and strong but you know as well as I do that he hasn't your skill in science."

Otho expanded under the praise.

"Sure, Chief, I know that," he answered cockily. "His iron fingers

can't handle instruments deftly."

"That's it," Curt agreed seriously. "But don't tell him I said this. We don't want to hurt his feelings."

"Depend on me to keep quiet about it, Chief," promised Otho.

Ten minutes later, Curt Newton and Grag rose above the city in a small, fast Tark Twelve rocket-ship borrowed from the Planet Patrol station. At high speed, it screamed north through the night over the black mountains that rimmed the Shining Sea.

Curt was heading for the famous Valley of Voices. He had been told that there was an entrance to the labyrinth of caverns that extended deep down into the planet. He had brought certain instruments and weapons from the *Comet*. But he realized that even armed with scientific powers as he was, it was a hazardous descent he was about to make into the bottomless caverns from which no explorer had ever returned.

CHAPTER VII

Johnny's Defiance



JOHNNY KIRK had been inordinately proud when Captain Future had asked him to remain and guard the *Comet*. The tough youngster did not suspect that it was only a device to keep him in the ship.

After Curt and the Futuremen had departed toward the looming tower of Skal Kar's laboratory, Johnny began standing guard in dead earnest. He took a proton gun from the space-suit locker and sat in the airlock-door, looking out across the green-lit landscape of Ariel.

Johnny Kirk was the product of one of the toughest environments in the System—the space-dock district of New York. He had grown up, parentless and friendless, in those shabby slums. He had learned to take care of himself, to outwit his enemies,

and to hate the authority of the law. He had a hearty dislike for the "sky-cops"—the Planet Police. But Captain Future had always been his supreme hero. He had dreamed of being one of those glamorous Futuremen who followed the red-haired planeteer on his flashing, adventurous space-trails. And now it had happened! Here he was, almost a Futureman himself!

"Wish the gang back by the space-docks could see me now," he thought happily.

Johnny suddenly sprang to his feet. A small ship was swooping down from the planet-lit sky. It landed only a dozen yards from the *Comet*. From it hastily emerged a giant green Jovian, a fat Earthman and a tall Martian. Johnny heard the Jovian call to the other two.

"Come on—now's our chance to grab the ship, while they're in the laboratory!"

The three men came running toward the *Comet*. Johnny Kirk, bristling belligerently, bounded out with his proton gun.

"Grab this ship? Not much!" snapped the tough Earth youngster. He pressed the trigger of his weapon and a thin, pale blue ray drilled through the Martian of the trio. He fell in a dead heap.

At that moment, Johnny Kirk heard a yell from the distant tower and knew that the Futuremen had heard and were coming.

"No chance now!" he heard the big Jovian curse. "Back out of here before those devils get us!"

"You don't get away so easy!"

Johnny snapped, and plunged after them. He pursued the Jovian and the fat Earthman right to the door of their little ship. The great Jovian whirled with astonishing swiftness. His outflung fist caught Johnny's head.

Johnny saw stars, and was aware that he was stumbling and falling inside the door of the outlaws' ship. He heard the Jovian yelling.

"Up out of here, Xexel! This brat spoiled the whole plan!"

Johnny heard a door slam and then, with a roar of rocket-tubes, the ship lurched skyward. Still on the floor, he glimpsed the Jovian's hands reaching down.

"I'll fixt this cub for what he did!" snarled the giant green man.

"No, Thikar!" cried the throaty voice of the fat one. "We can use him alive. Throw him in that locker."

A heavy hand grabbed the half-dazed youngster, and he was slammed into a crowded little locker whose door clanged shut. Johnny groggily gathered himself up into a sitting position.

"I let them take me like a little sissy," Johnny thought wrathfully. "I ought to have blasted them down, instead of ordering 'em to stop. Well, anyway I got one—and Captain Future will get these others."

THE boy's tremendous confidence in Captain Future was unshaken. He wasn't afraid. Sooner or later, Captain Future would rescue him.

He could hear Thikar, the big, brutal Jovian, yelling to the man at

[Turn page]

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the controls of the little ship. "Faster, Xexel! There comes the *Comet* after us!"

"Can't go faster!" whined a cracked voice. "Future's ship can fly rings around us. We'll have to make the dimension-shift now or they'll have us!"

"All right!" Thikar bellowed. "Brace yourselves—here goes!"

Johnny heard Thikar start some mechanism whose powerful hum rose swiftly to a penetrating, tingling vibration. Then the lad suddenly felt a ghastly shock. He seemed thrust into a bellowing blackness in which each atom of his body was wrenched by supernal forces. Finally the awful sensation passed, leaving him quivering and shaken.

"What in the devil was that?" Johnny wondered bewilderedly.

He could see nothing, locked as he was in the dark metal cabinet. But he heard Thikar's coarse laugh.

"We're safe now," the Jovian criminal exulted. "Captain Future can't follow us *here*. How I'd like to have seen his face when we disappeared in front of his eyes!"

Johnny Kirk's bewilderment increased. What had that awful shock of strange force meant? How had this craft escaped the *Comet*?

"Head back to base, Xexel," Thikar was ordering. "Keep over on *this side* until we're in the right spot—then shift back over."

"All right, all right," quavered the cracked voice of the old pilot, Xexel. "But I wouldn't want to be in your shoes when we do get back. Quorn's going to be plenty angry with you for bungling the thing."

"Was it my fault?" roared the Jovian. "How could we know that they'd have that brat watching their ship? Who is he, anyway?"

"We'll find out when we get to our base," answered the voice of the fat Earthman, Lucas Brewer. "By taking at least a hostage back to Quorn, we'll be able to placate that devil a little for our failure."

Indifferent to this peril, Johnny Kirk became drowsy from the close air and monotonous drone of the rocket-tubes. He did not know how

much time had passed before he was aroused by the sound of Thikar's bull voice.

"The dual sextant shows we're there, Xexel. Hold her steady while I shift back over."

Once more Johnny heard the penetrating vibration begin. He braced himself. And, as he expected, there came again the mysterious, rending shock of uncanny force which seemed to plunge him into a black abyss.

His consciousness swam up out of the blackness a few moments later. Presently the locker door was unlocked and opened. Johnny Kirk, who had braced himself for this moment, plunged out like a mad wildcat. His small fists flailed right and left at the criminals. He beat a devil's tattoo on the paunch of the Earthman before the hand of the towering Jovian grabbed his collar and shook him to a state of limpness.

"Try that again and I'll snap your neck," roared Thikar.

"Aw, go chase a meteor, you big greenie," gasped Johnny, shaken but unterrified.

They hauled him out of the ship. And Johnny Kirk momentarily forgot his belligerence in the amazement of the scene.

The little ship was resting on the floor of a vast, semi-dark rocky cavern. It was an awesome natural chamber whose black rock walls towered sheer to a jagged roof two hundred feet overhead. The cavern was a half mile long, and almost that wide. Through it foamed a river that emerged from one end of the cavern and vanished into the other.

A big mass of blue-shining mineral that cropped from the cavern wall shed a vague light that relieved the darkness. By the shore of the river, near the middle of the cavern, Johnny Kirk perceived a group of small metalloy buildings clustered around a long, looming framework of metal girders. Krypton-lights illuminated this queer little community.

JOHNNY KIRK was thunderstruck. "How did they get the space ship into this cave? I must be dreamin'!"

His captors led him toward the little group of portable metalloy shacks. His astonishment increased as he saw that the big, long framework of metal girders cradled a new space ship under construction. It was several times larger than the little ship in which he had been brought here. A half dozen men under direction of a rugged, hard-featured Earthman were manipulating the marvelous atomic machine tools which automatically squeezed alloy bars into the exact shapes required by the construction of the ship.

"Building a big space ship here in a cave!" Johnny muttered. "They sure are wacky. How'll they ever get it out?"

The portable metalloy shacks were supply shacks and barracks huts. As they approached, a man and girl came to meet them. Under the glow of krypton bulbs, the man seemed a slender, unimpressive figure. But when Johnny Kirk was hauled before him, the youngster quickly revised that opinion.

This man, he saw, was a mixed breed. He wore a striped Martian turban and yellow-sleeved purple robe. There was something tigerish about his drowsy black eyes that chilled the tough Earth youngster.

"Who is that you've brought, Thikar?" the Magician of Mars asked the giant Jovian, eying Johnny Kirk.

Thikar shifted uneasily.

"This brat was with the Futuremen on Ariel, Quorn. I wanted to blast him for spoiling our attempt to trap Future, but Lucas Brewer insisted on bringing him along to you."

A dangerous yellow spark glimmered back in the depths of Ul Quorn's unfathomable eyes, but he spoke without change of expression.

"Am I to understand," Quorn purred, "that you failed to spring the trap on Future?"

"It wasn't our fault, Chief!" protested the big Jovian. "We hid in the jungle on Ariel near the stockade, just as you told us to do. And Captain Future came to investigate Skal Kar's laboratory just as you figured he would. We'd have got his *Comet* and left him for the gas-beasts to finish, as

you planned, if it hadn't been for this brat."

Thikar told how Johnny Kirk had foiled their attempt to hijack the *Comet*.

"We had to rocket out of there quick, Chief. The Earth-brat tried to stop us but I knocked him out and we brought him along."

LUCAS BREWER spoke hastily to Quorn.

"I thought maybe the boy could tell us how much Future has learned."

Quorn's black eyes suddenly had raging lightnings in them.

"You stupid fools! I give you a perfect plan for getting rid of Future and you let the unexpected presence of a boy ruin it! You idiots can't carry out the simplest orders to help me!"

Thikar's green face darkened with passion and his hand strayed toward the atom pistol at his belt.

"Nobody can talk to me like that," the big Jovian said thickly.

Quorn's black eyes narrowed to pinpoints and his own arm tensed clawlike above the pistol in his belt-holster.

"Do you feel rebellious, Thikar?" he purred tigerishly. "Would you like to argue the matter with me? If so—go right ahead!"

Johnny Kirk saw Thikar's sullen eyes waver and drop before the deadly menace in the mixed breed's face. The Jovian was outfaced.

The girl beside Ul Quorn intervened. She was pure Martian in beauty, with midnight hair and slumberous eyes and smooth red features of sultry loveliness. In her tight green bodice and slit skirt, she was lithe and quick as a sand-cat of her native world.

"We'll get nowhere by quarreling with each other," she told Ul Quorn anxiously in her low, husky voice. "Wouldn't it be better to find out what the boy actually can tell us about Captain Future's plans?"

Johnny Kirk saw a glint of yellow light that was pure hatred come into the dark eyes of the Martian beauty as she pronounced the name.

"You're right, N'Rala," Ul Quorn told her somberly. He bent his gaze on Johnny. "Who are you, boy? What

were you doing with Future?"

Johnny bristled. "I'm one of Captain Future's gang, see? If you think I'm going to tell you anything about him, you're crazy. And when Captain Future catches up with you, it'll be too bad for you!"

UL QUORN started at the belligerent youngster.

"You've got a lot of faith in Future, haven't you?"

"Sure I have. He's the greatest guy in the System," shrilled Johnny. "The swellest fighter and the swellest scientist of them all."

To Johnny's amazement, Quorn nodded slowly.

"You're not far wrong," said the mixed breed thoughtfully. "There is nobody in the System to match Future in brilliance and audacity—except myself."

Quorn's voice rang oddly sincere.

"It's too bad that two men like Future and me have to be enemies, that soon I shall have to kill the only man in the System I could accept as my equal."

N'Rala's eyes flashed angry impatience.

"One would think you had forgotten the feud between you and Future!"

"No, I haven't forgotten," Quorn answered softly. "I've never forgotten that it was his Futuremen who killed my father. He and they must die for that, once we have the treasure and its power. But when I kill Future, I'll be killing the only man in the System whom I really respect."

N'Rala and the others stared at the brooding mixed breed in wondering incomprehension. It was Thikar, the Jovian, who broke the silence.

"If that brat won't tell us anything, we might as well dispose of him now," growled the big Jovian, nodding toward Johnny Kirk.

Johnny clenched his small fists. He felt death close, but he was resolved not to show fear.

"Come on, you guys, and try it!" he taunted.

Ul Quorn, looking at him, smiled.

"He has courage, and I like courage," murmured the Magician of Mars. "And he might come in handy as a hostage. Lock him up in that

empty supply shack for the time being."

Johnny Kirk was hauled away by the Jovian, and tossed unceremoniously into a small metal shack at one edge of the little community. As he picked himself up, he heard the door barred on the outside.

"Big green mug!" he muttered wrathfully.

The supply shack was one of portable type, but its metal walls were windowless. The floor was of the hard black rock.

"Tough joint to crack," Johnny Kirk told himself, frowning. "Still, I got something to work with."

He peered through the crack of the door. He could see a narrow sector of the dimlit cavern. It included the other buildings and the half-completed space ship over which Quorn's men were laboring with feverish haste.

"Wonder where this cave is?" Johnny marveled. "It can't be on that moon Ariel—maybe it's on one of the other moons. And how in the devil did they get in here in that little space ship?" He shrugged, gave up speculation.

His captors had searched Johnny. But they hadn't found the thin, flat case he carried in his shirt. They had only slapped his pockets. The lad drew out the case. In it were a dozen fine steelite tools. It was the burglar kit he had won from the Martian burglar, in gambling.

The tough youngster took a thin saw-blade and began passing it back and forth through the crack of the door, above the lower hinge. He meant to saw through the hinge, but the hard metal resisted.

He sawed on, only stopping hours later when Thikar came and shoved a bowl of synthetic food in to him. After eating, Johnny slept for a time. He awoke to begin work again on the hinge. When he had it almost sawed through, he quit work on it and began on the upper hinge.

He stopped again to eat and sleep. He had no notion of how much time had elapsed. Finally he had the top hinge nearly severed also. Johnny peered toward the other buildings. No one was close by, for all Quorn's men seemed gathered around the big

new space ship which seemed practically completed.

Johnny hastily cut the last bit of the hinges away. He grabbed the door and slid it inward, and slipped out through the opening. At once, he darted along the dim cavern away from the lights of Quorn's base.

"Don't know where I'm going, but I'll find a way out of here somehow," he told himself doggedly.

He moved along the shore of the river that foamed through the dim cavern, picking his way hastily amid enormous black boulders. Suddenly in the semi-darkness there rose from behind a boulder an awesome, unhuman shape. Before Johnny Kirk could recoil from that vague figure, it had seized him.

CHAPTER VIII

People of Darkness



UNDER the brilliant moons of Uranus, Captain Future and Grag flew northward to begin their hazardous attempt to reach the radite cavern. Their little borrowed Tark cruiser thrummed sturdily over the vast mountain ranges and awesome chasms.

"We ought to see the Valley of Voices soon," Curt Newton commented, peering ahead from the controls. "From what they told us, the entrance to the caves is near the western end of that valley."

"Cursed if I like meddling in caves," grumbled Grag. "Remember the time we were trapped in that cavern on Neptune's moon?"

Curt chuckled. "I remember. You wore your finger-drills down to the bits cutting a way out."

"And anyway, this is all a gamble," Grag went on. "We don't know for sure that Quorn's base is really down in that radite cavern."

"No, but everything points to it," Captain Future defended. "And we've got to get that devil before he slips

away into the other universe, Grag."

The robot clenched great metal fists.

"If I get my hands on Ul Quorn he'll never trouble us again!"

They flew on above the unending peaks and ridges until Curt descried a moonlit gorge far ahead. It was of great depth, a sheer-walled valley between two towering ranges that ran roughly from east to west.

It was the famous Valley of Voices. Curt Newton brought the little Tark down into it and came to a landing in a little plain near the western end of the valley. Captain Future slung around his shoulder the bulky instrument he had brought from Lulanee, followed Grag out of the ship.

"So this is the Valley of Voices," grunted Grag. "It doesn't look like much to me."

They looked along the great gorge at whose bottom they stood. It was deep shadow down here at the floor of the valley. They could only dimly see the grassy fields and shrubs around them, and the "floating flowers," the unique flora of Uranus. Those large white blossoms drifted in the air like fairy blooms, drenching the soft night with fragrance.

The moons gleamed off the upper walls of the valley. Those sheer cliffs were mantled with thin, glittering sheets of talc that had exuded from the rock.

"I thought there were some wonderful echoes in this place," Grag commented disappointedly. "I can't hear anything."

"It's only when the wind blows and strikes those hanging sheets of talc that you hear anything," Curt told him. "Listen now!"

The wind had begun to sigh through the valley as he spoke. And as it struck the thin, drum-like talc sheets on the cliffs, a dim babel of sounds began to strike their ears. They grew louder as the wind strengthened.

Hundreds of voices speaking in many different planetary languages could be heard. Snarls of animals, the hoarse chattering of cliff-apes and screams of great thunder-hawks, and others added to the din. The roar of rocket-fliers echoed loudly. Crash of thunder and hiss of rain intensified the

uproar that had now become almost deafening.

"Melt me down!" swore Grag. "Talk about echoes—this place is a madhouse of them!"

"Every sound that has been made in this valley for ages past is recorded by the peculiar crystalline substance of those talc-sheets," Captain Future told him. "The wind striking the sheets releases every recorded sound, over and over again."

The wind died a little, and the roar lessened as Captain Future and the towering robot trudged along the floor of the valley. Curt's keen eyes soon spied the entrance to the labyrinth of caverns below.

IT was a large, roughly circular aperture in the southern cliff, into which poured a small stream. Curt Newton entered with intrepid step, and in a moment he and Grag stood in a smothering darkness. Curt took from his belt the small infra-red lamp he had brought and sent its ruddy beam quivering forward. It disclosed a gloomy natural tunnel winding down through the rock, with the stream flowing through it.

"Depressing-looking place," muttered Grag in dislike. "Dark as outer space."

"There's a little light in the lower strata," Captain Future told him. "The veins of radioactive mineral in the rock shed a certain amount of light."

Curt had opened the case of the instrument whose strap was slung around his shoulder. It was a radite-compass, used by Uranian prospectors. Its mechanism was sensitive to the emanations of radite, even at a great distance, and actuated a needle that pointed always to the emanations' source.

The needle pointed northeast and downward, showing that the radite cavern they sought was somewhere in that direction. Captain Future and his great comrade tramped on down the winding tunnel, their feet splashing in the stream that flowed through it.

Presently the tunnel debouched down into a vast cavern. It was feebly illuminated by the weak radiance of

shining radioactive ores that rifted the roof and walls.

"I can see pretty well here, Chief," Grag announced.

"That's why I brought you instead of Otho. Your photo-electric eyes see better than his in semi-darkness," Curt informed the robot.

Grag seemed flattered.

"Sure, that son of a rubber plant couldn't see his hand in front of him here, I'll bet."

Pleased with himself, Grag followed Curt along the eastern wall of the vast, dim cavern. White lichens towered about them like a grotesque forest. On the rock ledges above them he saw enormous bat-like creatures, their scaly white wings folded about them in sleep.

Following the guidance of the radite-compass needle, Captain Future entered the first tunnel that diverged northeastward. A larger underground stream ran through it, broiling downward. The two intrepid adventurers pressed on.

"How much farther do we have to go, Chief?" Grag demanded.

"Plenty far," was Curt's unpromising answer. "The intensity gauge on the radite-compass shows the deposit is still a long way off. And moderate that bellowing voice of yours, will you?" he added warningly. "The People of Darkness range through all these caverns."

"The cave-people they warned us about?" Grag said. "Who's afraid of them? They might have scared out other explorers, but not me."

The connecting caverns seemed endless as Curt and the robot penetrated ever deeper. Curt felt a gnawing anxiety that spurred him onward. The thought that even at this moment Ul Quorn and his band might finally be departing into the other universe was a deepening shadow of worry across his mind.

He and Grag were moving down a dim chasm beside the waters of a racing little river, when Curt glimpsed something rushing toward them.

"Cave-spider!" he yelled, and grabbed for his proton pistol.

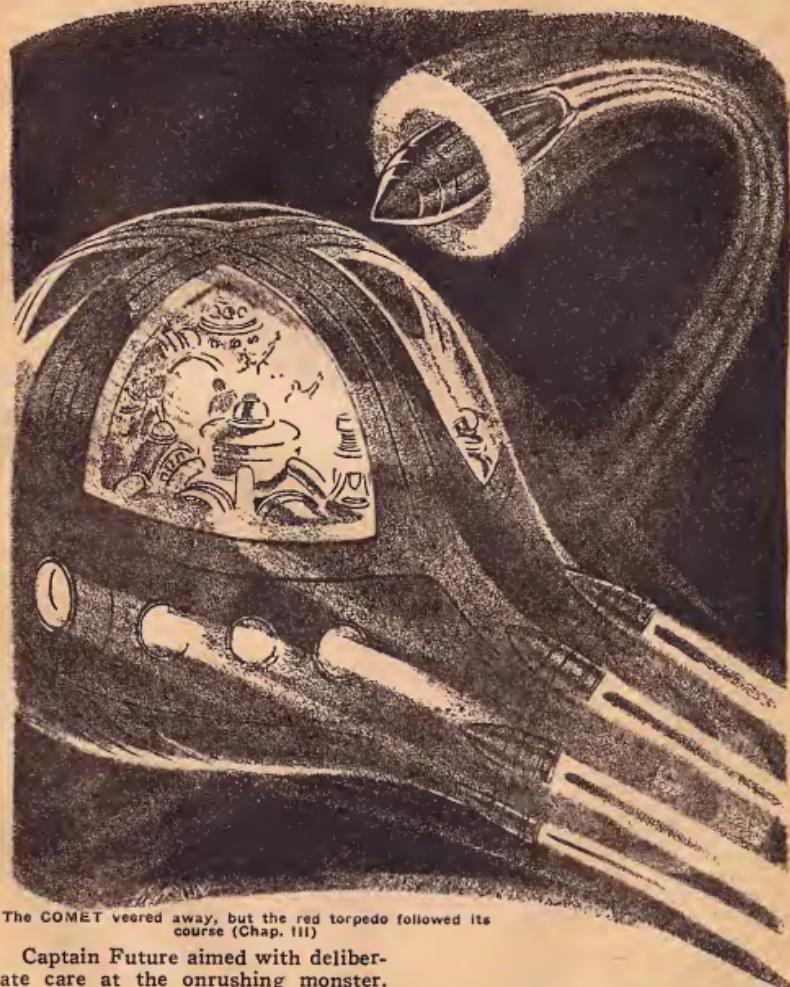
"Holy sun-imps!" gasped Grag.

The thing charging toward them was an incredible monstrosity. Its

huge, hairy white body was supported by eight-foot jointed, hairy limbs upon which it moved with blurring speed. Its saucer-like eyes glowed redly in its hideous face, beneath which great fanged jaws gaped widely.

"It's the biggest cave-spider I've ever heard of, though I knew they grow big down here," Curt admitted. He strode forward to the thing a little cautiously.

The giant spider was already dead. But, bending over it, Curt discovered



The COMET veered away, but the red torpedo followed its course (Chap. III)

Captain Future aimed with deliberate care at the onrushing monster. The blue streak of his proton ray drove through the creature's left eye. The giant thing threshed in a wild flurry of dying limbs.

"It looks like something out of a bad dream!" Grag declared.

something that sent a new thrill of alarm through him. Imbedded in the hairy, hideous body of the cave-spider was a short metal spear.

"This creature has just been stabbed by a hunter!" Captain Future

exclaimed. "See, the wound's still bleeding. The thing must have been running away from its hunter—"

"I hear footsteps now!" Grag declared, interrupting him.

Curt Newton at once drew the robot back with him into a shadowy recess at the side of the chasm. They waited tensely.

From ahead there appeared a hurrying human figure. It was a young man, whose skin was a faint yellowish white. He was garbed in a short tunic of woven lichen-fibers and carried a long hunting knife.

The hunter uttered a low cry of triumph as he perceived the dead cave-spider. He bent eagerly over his prey, examining it with eyes that Curt Newton saw had extraordinarily large black pupils. Then, as he examined the dead creature, the hunter uttered a cry of amazement.

"Grag, we'll grab him—but don't hurt him!" Curt whispered.

The two suddenly leaped out on either side of the hunter. The man whirled instantly and drove his knife at Grag's breast. But the knife clattered off the metal chest of the robot. The hunter seemed so stupefied by Grag that it was easy for Curt to seize him before he could make further resistance.

Captain Future spoke quickly to the man.

"We are your friends, and will not harm you."

Curt spoke in the oldest form of the Uranian language, hoping that the man would understand. His hope was rewarded, for after a moment the wild-faced hunter answered in a tongue that was vaguely similar.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "And who is this giant metal one?"

"How come you can talk the language of these People of Darkness, Chief?" Grag asked astonishedly of Captain Future.

"It's the old Uranian language," Curt told him. "The People of Darkness are supposed to be Uranians who fled down into these caverns ages ago from enemies. I figured they'd still speak a variant of the old language."

"We are from above," he told the hunter. "The metal one is your friend

as I am, though his body is not of flesh."

"No men from above are our friends!" declared the hunter emphatically. "We kill them whenever they come down into the caves."

Captain Future had had long experience in dealing with primitive planetary peoples, and knew what line to take.

"You could not kill us, for we could slay all your people instantly with our weapons such as killed this cave-spider," Curt said firmly. "And the metal one beside me could destroy you with his bare hands."

Grag took his cue. He extended his mighty metal arms above his head, then drummed with his great fists upon his metal breast to make a thunderous clangor. At the same time, he shouted deafeningly in his booming mechanical voice.

"I'm Grag, the toughest guy in all the nine worlds!" he howled. "I push planets around and eat moons for breakfast!"

The hunter was utterly impressed by Grag's performance. He looked with deep awe at the mighty robot. And though Curt had now released the man, he made no effort to escape.

"The metal one is indeed mighty," muttered the Darkness man.

"But he is your friend, as I am," Curt said quickly. "Now take us to your village, for we wish to visit your people."

The hunter nodded. He picked up the slain cave-spider, with a great effort, to pack it home. Grag nonchalantly took the heavy beast from him with one hand, slung it effortlessly over his shoulder. More impressed than ever, the hunter led the way back along the chasm through which he had come.

THEY passed out of the chasm into other caverns, traversing a bewildering labyrinth of cavernous spaces and crevices.

"How come we're visiting this fellow's village?" Grag asked Captain Future. "We haven't time for exploring, have we?"

"This isn't idle exploring, you idiot," retorted Curt Newton. "This

fellow's people may be able to tell us the quickest route down to the radite cavern. It'd be faster than finding our way by compass."

The hunter appeared to know his way through every crevice.

"He seems to see in this darkness better even than I can," Grag commented.

"Sure, didn't you notice his eyes?" Curt replied. "These People of Darkness have evolved to fit this environment. They've developed eyes with super-large pupils capable of gathering every ray of light."

Soon their new companion led them out into a very large, dim cavern. Along one side of it raced the underground river.

"There is the village of my people," pointed the hunter.

It was a queer village. The "houses" were without roofs or walls, for shelter was unnecessary in the warm, dry caverns. Each house was in fact nothing but a square marked out along a straggling street, each square containing the weapons and other belongings of a single family.

Curt noticed long, slim boats of crude hammered metal drawn up along the shore of the river. He guessed that these People of Darkness subsisted on the fish they caught, the animals they hunted, and the edible spore-pods of the great lichens.

There were scores of the People of Darkness in the dim village. Men, women and children were all garbed in tunics of lichen-fiber. The men rose in alarm and grabbed their spears as Curt and his companions appeared.

"These two are friends!" called the hunter to his alarmed folk.

A white-haired oldster who was evidently the chief of the village spoke to Curt's companion.

"Why do you bring men from above here?" he demanded. "All men above are our enemies. It was they who long ago made us take refuge here."

"We are your friends," Curt Newton said quickly. "We are ourselves the enemies of those who forced your ancestors to flee down here."

Curt reflected that the race that had once forced these people to take

flight into the caves had perished centuries past, anyway. It wouldn't hurt to say that he was the enemy of that race—as indeed, he would have been had it happened in his own time.

His declaration seemed convincing. The People of Darkness regarded the two with less hostility.

"If you are an enemy of our ancient persecutors, you are indeed our friends," the old chief declared. "You are welcome among us. You shall live here with us, and hunt and fish with us the rest of your lives."

"Some prospect, that," grunted Grag when Curt had translated.

CAPTAIN FUTURE spoke earnestly to the old man.

"Much as we would like to do so, we can't remain here. But we ask your help. We seek to find a certain cavern in which is a great deposit of a shining blue mineral."

He described radite to them. The old chief nodded understandingly.

"I know that place in which the blue mineral exists. But it is far, far down in the caverns, farther than we ordinarily ever venture. The river in this cave flows down through that distant cavern, too."

"What is the shortest way to the radite cavern?" Curt asked.

"There is no short way. It will take you very long to find your way to it."

Curt felt dismayed. Then a daring thought entered his mind.

"You said this river flows down to the radite cavern? Then we could borrow one of your boats and float down in it to that cavern."

"That would be taking a fearful risk," the old chief exclaimed. "Not far below here there are terrible rapids and cataracts in the river, into which we never dare venture in our boats."

"We're going to venture—we've got to!" Captain Future retorted. "If you'll lend us a boat—"

"We will give you one," said the old chief, "for you will never live to return it." He led the way sadly toward the river-bank.

"Cheerful old cuss," chuckled Curt as he and Grag followed. Presently

Curt was inspecting the boat the People of Darkness had untied. It was a canoe-like craft twelve feet long, made of hammered metal. It had two heavy metal paddles.

CURT took his place in its bow. Grag hopped in beside him. They grasped the paddles, and with a hand-wave to the People of Darkness, Curt pushed out into the current.

"Farewell, friends from above!" called the old chief. "It is a pity you have to go and get killed before we know you better."

"Some send-off!" grinned Captain Future. "Paddle, Grag! We've got to keep from being dashed against the cliffs!"

The racing black current was already bearing them at great speed down the length of the cavern. The foaming waters entered a large tunnel at the end of the cave, and into that they were borne at increased velocity.

The low roof of the tunnel echoed back the roar of the waters. Captain Future had set his infra-red search-light in the bow to stab its beam ahead and show them rocks and ledges. To be dashed against one at this speed would mean destruction.

Faster and faster roared the raging current, bearing them down toward the depths of the planet through winding tunnels and dim, vast caves. They were soon traveling at such speed that the rock walls about them were only a dim blur. Showers of spray dashed Curt's face, and his adventure-loving soul felt keenly the intoxicating excitement of the moment.

They shot into a broad, long tunnel where the waters foamed white in raging rapids. Great rocks protruded from the foam like menacing fangs, and the current seemed fiendishly intent on hurling their little craft against the obstacles.

"To the right, Grag—paddle harder!" Curt yelled back to the robot over the roar of the rapids.

"I can't keep her steady in this current!" Grag shouted.

Curt's laugh pealed back.

"Don't say that! Remember, you're Grag the mighty, the fellow who pushes planets around. Paddle!"

They whirled sickeningly down through the foaming stretches, grazing rocks, whipping past obstacles barely visible in the dim light. A moment later they plunged into a new series of rapids. But when they had won through those, they were in comparatively smoother water.

"I think we're past the worst!" Curt called. "But—what's that?"

From ahead came a dim thunder that was growing louder by the second, a frightening booming toward which they were swiftly racing. Then Curt saw that the tunnel ahead debouched into a sheer, empty abyss. The river tumbled down into that vast space in a thundering waterfall.

"Paddle back, or we'll go over that fall!" Curt yelled.

They paddled madly, but it was too late. The irresistible current swept them on. Their boat poised a moment on the brink of the vague abyss, then plunged sickeningly over the edge.

CHAPTER IX

Across Dimensions



CURT NEWTON had only a momentary glimpse of a vast, vaguely lit cavernous abyss into which the river tumbled for almost a hundred feet. Then the little metal boat went over the brink of the fall.

Thunderous waters roared in Curt's ears as he and Grag were tossed dizzily from the boat. Turning over and over as he fell among the plunging waters, Captain Future glimpsed a great foaming pool rushing up at him. He straightened, struck the pool like a diver.

He went deep down into the seething waters, the shock of impact almost stunning him. Then he fought up to the surface, his lungs bursting

as he struggled against the whirling currents. He broke surface and found himself being whirled crazily around by the eddying currents of the pool.

There was no sign of Grag or the boat. Yet Curt did not try to search for his companion. He struck out in great strokes that soon brought him to the rocky shore of the pool. There he stood, panting.

"The People of Darkness weren't fooling when they said this river is dangerous," Curt muttered to himself, ruefully.

Captain Future sat down on the rocky shore and waited. He wasn't worried about Grag. He knew Grag would have sunk to the bottom of the pool like a stone, but the robot couldn't drown for he didn't breathe.

Soon, Curt saw a dripping metal figure come up out of the pool. It was Grag. The big robot was walking up out of the water, dragging the metal boat with him. He had also secured the paddles.

"Well, Grag, that was fun, wasn't it?" Curt greeted him.

"Fun?" cried the robot. Then he indulged in some of his choicest interplanetary profanity. "If that's your idea of fun, may I be cut up and sold for scrap! I was walking around, down on the bottom of that pool, trying to find the boat and paddles. A big water-snake coiled around me and I had the devil of a time getting rid of it. And you call it fun!"

"I was only joking, Grag," Captain Future chuckled. "Haven't you any sense of humor?"

"My sense of humor doesn't cover crazy expeditions like this one," Grag growled. "I knew something like this would happen."

"Come on, we've got to get on," Curt told him, entering the boat and grasping a paddle. "I hope we don't hit any more waterfalls."

"If we do, I get out and walk!" threatened Grag.

They pushed off again upon the underground river. The infra-red searchlight which Curt had had in its bow was lost, as was his compass. But he paddled resolutely on down the strange waterway. They encountered more rapids. But when they

had won past these, the river ran smooth and fast through very high tunnels and caves.

"We're very deep down in the caves now," Curt called back to the sulky robot. "We should have reached the radite cavern by now."

"Probably we've lost our way and will drift on down till we reach the center of Uranus," prophesied Grag gloomily. "A nice prospect!"

They shot out of the long tunnel they were traversing into a big, elongated cavern that was more brightly illuminated than any yet.

"Those are krypton lights ahead!" Captain Future exclaimed. "Paddle over to shore, Grag. We've found Ul Quorn's base!"

Curt and the robot paddled furiously to get their craft to shore before they were carried down past those lighted buildings. By herculean efforts they won out of the racing current and pulled the boat up among the big boulders that rimmed the shore.

Captain Future and Grag crouched down behind a towering boulder and peered intently at the little community a thousand feet down the cavern.

"It's Quorn's workshop, all right," Curt muttered. "Look at that ship."

"Melt me down!" exclaimed Grag. "Only the Magician of Mars would have a lair down here inside Uranus!"

THEY could clearly see a large space ship whose torpedo-like metal bulk loomed amid the small metal shacks.

"That's Quorn's big new dimension-shifting cruiser!" Captain Future said tensely. "And it looks about complete. Quorn must be nearly ready now to start on his treasure expedition into the other universe."

"How're we going to stop him, Chief?" whispered Grag. "Shall we burst out on 'em and gun 'em down?"

"Too many of them for that," Curt retorted. "We've got two things to do here. First, we have to see if they've got young Johnny Kirk here. Then we have to make sure that that new ship doesn't depart."

Curt loosened his proton pistol in its holster.

"I'm going to steal a little closer and reconnoiter. You wait here—"

"Look, Chief!" Grag whispered suddenly. "Someone's coming!"

A figure could be seen stealing toward them along the bank of the river. The smallness of the figure and its stealth were puzzling.

"Holy sun-imps, it's Johnny Kirk!" Grag muttered bewilderedly.

Curt laughed softly.

"That boy has stuff in him. He's found a way somehow to escape. Let him come on, Grag—but grab him before he can utter any cry. He might give us away, in his surprise."

Johnny Kirk was coming straight toward them along the boulder-strewn bank of the river. The sturdy figure of the Earth youngster kept as much as possible in the shadow of the big boulders. Then as Johnny reached the boulder behind which Curt and Grag crouched, the robot suddenly grabbed the youngster and put one metal hand over his face to smother his cry of alarm.

"It's Captain Future, Johnny!" Curt whispered quickly to the struggling youngster. "Don't make any outcry."

Grag released the boy. In the dim light, Johnny's belligerent young face showed his astonishment and joy. But he tried to appear casual.

"Aw, I knew you'd get here, Captain Future," he declared. He turned to Grag. "What's the idea trying to choke me, huh?"

Curt explained rapidly to the youngster how he and Grag had come. And in turn, Johnny Kirk related the means of his escape.

"I always figured that kit of Martian burglar tools I won would come in handy some day," the youngster finished. "I did as good as a Futureman would do, didn't I? Can't I be one of your gang now?"

Curt Newton chuckled.

"Johnny, you're a little young for that. Suppose we put you down as a Future-Futureman, eh?"

"You mean maybe some day you'll take me on as a real Futureman?" the youngster asked eagerly. "Swell!"

"Tell me what you've found out about Quorn's plans," Curt asked.

The boy shook his head. "Not much, I think he's ready to go off in that new ship. They've been loading it with that blue-shining rock they dig from the big mass over yonder."

"If Quorn's stocking the craft with radite, he's about ready to take off into the co-existing universe," Curt muttered. "He's got to be stopped, even if—"

A distant cry of alarm interrupted. It came from one of Quorn's men.

"That's Thikar, who was my guard!" Johnny Kirk whispered. "He's found out that I've escaped."

Captain Future saw men come running toward the Jovian, Thikar. Then Curt glimpsed a slender, turbanned figure in a purple Martian robe. His fists clenched as he recognized the man.

"Ul Quorn himself!" he muttered. "The Magician of Mars, at last."

He could hear Quorn's angry voice. "Thikar, you're an idiot to have allowed that boy to escape. You and Xexel hunt for him. He can't have got far. The rest of you keep on loading the radite into the *Nova*."

The big Jovian and an old Saturnian obeyed the order. They started in opposite directions along the cavern, flashing hand-searchlights among the boulders as they searched.

IT was Xexel, the old Saturnian, who was approaching the end of the cavern in which Curt and Grag and Johnny crouched in hiding.

"That old rascal will find us here, Chief!" Grag cautioned.

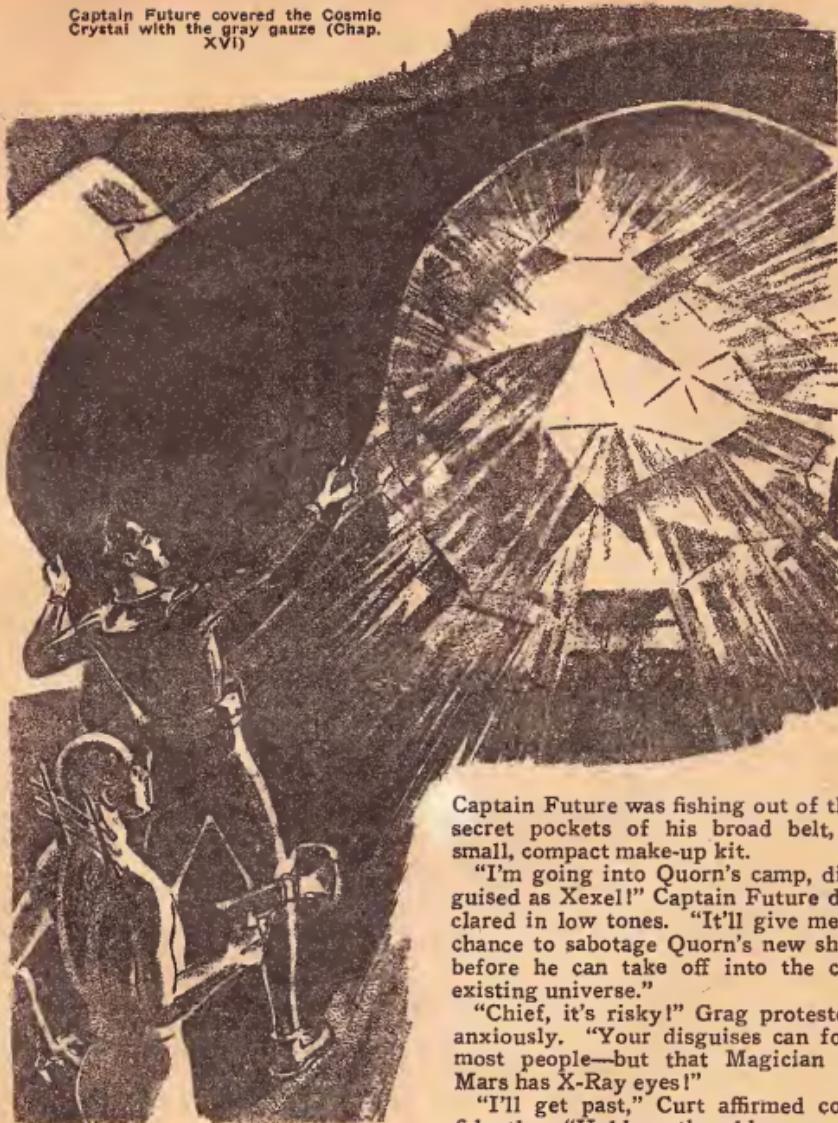
"I want him to—I've a swell idea," Captain Future whispered.

A daring but feasible expedient had entered Curt's mind as he saw the old Saturnian approaching.

Xexel, the Saturnian criminal, was growling to himself as he came on, turning his light into every shadow. Curt motioned Grag and Johnny to crouch lower. Captain Future himself tensed like a hunting cat, and crept around the big boulder to approach Xexel from the rear.

A swift, silent leap sent Curt plunging onto the old Saturnian's back. As he bore Xexel to the ground, his thumbs were pressing a vital nerve

Captain Future covered the Cosmic Crystal with the gray gauze (Chap. XVI)



in the old man's neck. Xexel went unconscious before he could cry out. Curt hastily dragged the limp form into the shadows.

"I don't get your move!" Grag exclaimed bewilderedly. "What are you going to do with Xexel?"

For answer, Curt stripped off the drab zipper-suit worn by the unconscious old criminal. A moment later

Captain Future was fishing out of the secret pockets of his broad belt, a small, compact make-up kit.

"I'm going into Quorn's camp, disguised as Xexel!" Captain Future declared in low tones. "It'll give me a chance to sabotage Quorn's new ship before he can take off into the co-existing universe."

"Chief, it's risky!" Grag protested anxiously. "Your disguises can fool most people—but that Magician of Mars has X-Ray eyes!"

"I'll get past," Curt affirmed confidently. "Hold up the old man so I can see his face."

In the dim light, working rapidly in stealth, Captain Future performed a miracle of make-up upon himself. He had learned the art long ago from Otho, the greatest master of disguise in the nine worlds.

Blue dye from a tiny tube smoothly smeared his face and hands to the dull blue Saturnian complexion. A drop

of eye-stain changed his gray eyes to black. A fine powder rubbed into his hair darkened it magically. Waxite pads inside his cheeks changed the shape of his features, and a cunning astringent produced a fine network of wrinkles on his face.

"How does it look?" asked Captain Future, in the shrill, slightly quavering voice in which he had heard the old Saturnian speak.

"You're a dead ringer for old Xexel!" gasped Johnny Kirk. "Gee, Captain Future—I don't know which of you is which."

Curt took off his "nine-planet" emblem ring and thrust it into his belt-pocket. Then he donned the old Saturnian's zipper-suit over his belt and proton pistol, and picked up Xexel's searchlight.

"You and Johnny wait here, Grag," he ordered the robot. "If I can get into that new ship without being challenged, I'll make sure it doesn't take off for a while! But if I do get into trouble, you stay out of it and wait for Simon and Otho to come."

Curt slipped from behind the boulder's shadow and began moving about with the stooped stride of the old Saturnian he was impersonating. He flashed his lamp here and there as though searching.

After some minutes of this, Captain Future limped back toward the lights and metal shacks of Quorn's work-base. His heart was thudding with anticipation as he approached. If this disguise passed muster with the keen-eyed Magician of Mars, he could effectually checkmate Quorn.

Curt found Ul Quorn standing by his new ship, the *Nova*, directing the half dozen men who were carrying lead boxes of radite into the ship.

"Hurry it up!" Quorn was ordering imperiously.

CURT instantly recognized the men. The hard-faced Earthman was Gray Garson, who had been behind the space ship hijacking ring on Mercury. The fatter, puffy-faced Earthman was Lucas Brewer, who had once nearly managed to kill him in the course of a gun-running plot on Jupiter. There were Lu Sentu, the cunning-faced, wizened Mercurian

thief, and Athor Az, the drowsy-eyed Venusian murderer. The Martian and Plutonian were as familiar.

"Nice crew that Ul Quorn has picked to help him hunt his treasure," Curt thought grimly. "The most dangerous outlaws of the system!"

Quorn turned toward him. Curt tensed as the fathomless black eyes of the Magician of Mars studied him.

"Well, did you find the boy, Xexel?" snapped Quorn.

"No, Chief, I couldn't spot him," answered Curt in quavering tones.

"Then he'll simply wander in the caves till he starves," Ul Quorn declared. "We can't waste more time hunting him. Help load that radite aboard. I want to get out of here before that devil Future comes."

Curt Newton pretended incredulity.

"Why, Chief, Captain Future couldn't follow us here!" he argued.

"You're an old fool, Xexel!" lashed Ul Quorn. "I know Future well enough to know that he'll trail us here somehow. Get at the loading!"

Curt limped away, toward the heap of leaden boxes which contained the radite Quorn and his men had quarried. Curt picked up one of the boxes and, pretending to hobble under its weight, moved with it toward the door of the *Nova*.

As he entered the ship with the other toiling men, Curt's eyes flashed around the interior. He saw in the fore-cabin of the craft a bulky machine whose main feature was a copper dome supported by three quartz rods above a complex of vacuum-tubes, condensers and wiring.

Captain Future recognized the machine as the heart of Quorn's ship—the dimension-shifting apparatus that would hurl the craft across the fifth-dimension gulf into the co-existing universe.

"If I can get my hands on that thing a moment!" he thought.

But he had no chance at present. The criminals were streaming in and out of the *Nova*, loading the radite. Curt Newton had to hobble back to the cyclotron room and dump the box of shining blue radite into the fuel bin.

As he left he saw N'Rala come out of one of the metal shacks and join Ul Quorn. A cold chill of apprehension

touched Curt as the slumbrous eyes of the lithe, beautiful Martian girl rested casually upon him.

"That hell-cat penetrated my disguise once!" he thought, remembering how N'Rala had exposed him during the Space-Stones case. "If she recognizes me now—"

But N'Rala only glanced indifferently at the limping old Saturnian. Reassured, he carried another box into the *Nova*. Again, Captain Future found it impossible to reach the vital machine in the fore-cabin. He would be noticed instantly.

The criminals crowded into the ship. Captain Future was among them, still maintaining his impersonation of the old Saturnian.

Curt's brain was racing. What could he do? Was his best chance to keep up his imposture for the present, to go along with Ul Quorn in the guise of Xexel and take the first opportunity to seize the ship? He swiftly decided that that daring plan was the only one now practicable.

The air-lock doors of the *Nova* were slammed. Its super-massive cyclotrons started droning with terrific

THE FUTUREMEN VISIT THE PAST

IN

THE LOST WORLD OF TIME



A Complete Book-Length Novel of the Tenth Planet

By EDMOND HAMILTON

THE FANTASY TREAT OF THE YEAR

FEATURED IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Curt began to feel a little desperate. He couldn't get at the dimension-shifter. And he knew that it would be madness to try to overpower these dozen criminals, even with Grag's help.

"All the radite's aboard, Chief!" announced Gray Garson as Curt started to emerge from the ship a second time.

"Then we start at once!" Ul Quorn ordered. "Get aboard, all of you. Garson, you'll take the controls. I'll handle the dimension-shifter."

power as the radite fuel fed into them. Then, under Gray Garson's control, the ship rose from the cavern floor.

"Stand by, everybody—I'm shifting over!" called Ul Quorn. And the Magician of Mars flung the switches of the dimension-shifter machine.

Curt felt a rending shock tear through every atom of his body. He seemed thrust into a roaring darkness. Slowly, he emerged from it. He realized that he and Quorn's treasure-seeking band had plunged into the co-existing universe.

CHAPTER X

Treasure Star



CAPTAIN FUTURE perceived that the view outside the windows of the space ship had magically changed. The ship no longer poised inside the dim cavern deep in Uranus. Instead, it was now hovering

in empty space.

It was the space of the other universe! The universe that co-existed with our own universe in the four dimensions of length, breadth, thickness and time, but that was separated from it along the fifth dimension. The Sun and nine worlds of the Solar System had disappeared. Strange constellations dotted the firmament.

"Now, which way, Chief?" Gray Garson called back to Ul Quorn from the controls.

"Yes, which way to the treasure?" asked Lucas Brewer, avidly. Cupidity was marked on the faces of all the criminals.

Quorn consulted certain yellowed papers, and then pointed through the fore window at a blazing white star of this alien universe.

"According to Harris Haines' old notes," said the Magician of Mars, "the treasure is on a world of that double star."

"Double star?" echoed Garson puzzledly. "That's not a double—it's a single white star."

"No, it's really a double," Quorn corrected. "A binary star, one of whose component suns is dead and dark and so cannot be seen."

Gray Garson cut in the rocket-tubes. Powered by the tremendous stream of energy that the super-powered radite generated, the *Nova* roared at mounting speed toward the distant white sun.

Curt Newton, in the quavering voice of the old Saturnian he was impersonating, asked Quorn a question.

"There won't be any danger lifting the treasure, will there?"

"There'll be plenty of danger," snapped Ul Quorn. "Harris Haines barely escaped with his life the first time he tried to seize it, and must have perished when he came back into this universe in his second attempt. But I've got some defenses that Haines didn't have."

"Can't you tell us now what this treasure is?" asked big Thikar, the Jovian. "We're going to a lot of work just on your word."

"My word is what rules this organization, and none of you had better question it!" flared the Magician of Mars.

The criminals recoiled, and were silent. It was evident to Captain Future that this hard-bitten crew had a healthy fear of their leader, and that Quorn did not trouble to hide his biting contempt of them.

As the *Nova* throbbed at high speed toward the brilliant white star in the distance, Curt racked his brain for an expedient to give him command of this perilous situation.

An idea suddenly came to Captain Future. If he could unexpectedly switch back the dimension-shifting apparatus and suddenly hurl the *Nova* back into his own universe, it would temporarily stun everyone aboard. He himself, expecting the shock, might be able to disarm the others before they recovered. But could he figure out the operation of the dimension-shifter?

"A slim chance—but about the only one I can see," Curt thought.

But Curt saw that he could not put the hazardous plan into execution at once.

Ul Quorn was standing by the dimension-shifter, going over the ancient, yellowed notes of Harris Haines. Now N'Rala joined Quorn.

"Have to wait," Curt Newton muttered disappointedly to himself.

Hours ticked by as the ship roared on. Curt began to feel baffled. Ul Quorn had remained near the dimension-shifter all this time, engaged in intricate calculations while the girl watched silently. And now they were drawing quite near to their goal, since the super-powered ship had been flying at a speed that matched that of the *Comet* itself.

CURT NEWTON stared ahead at the treasure-star. From this close, the star was clearly a binary. One of its suns was the great, hot white orb. The other was an equally large sun, but one that was dark and dead. No light came from its cindery, black sphere except a red glow of burning lava at a few points, which hinted of dying fires beneath. Around these two suns in a very elongated orbit moved three planets. The nearest of these planets was on the dark-star side of the double sun.

Gray Garson called from the control-room.

"Which of those three worlds shall I steer for, Quorn?"

"I'll give you the course," Ul Quorn answered. He picked up his notes and calculations and went forward with N'Rala to the control room.

Captain Future saw his opportunity. The criminals were pressed against the windows, staring eagerly at the spectacle ahead. No one noticed Curt as he hastened to the big dimension-shifter machine.

Hastily, Curt examined the apparatus, peering beneath the copper dome at the complexity of instruments in its interior, and at the switches. Captain Future was trying to figure the exact combination of switches he must throw to hurl the whole ship back into his own universe. If he could fathom the control system of this apparatus—

"What are you doing here, Xexel?" demanded a suspicious voice.

Curt turned swiftly. Ul Quorn had come back from the control room and was staring at him with suspicion in his deep black eyes.

"I was just looking over this machine, Chief," Curt answered in the shrill quaver of the old Saturnian. "I was trying to figure out how it works, but I guess it's beyond an unscientific old pirate like me."

"Why, you know how the thing works," Ul Quorn exclaimed. "I explained the principle to all of you when I had you help me install it."

"Oh, sure, I guess I just forgot," Curt said hastily, cursing himself for making such a slip.

He limped casually over to the window and peered with the others at

the double star close ahead. Inwardly, he felt dashed. He'd not had time to do anything with the dimension-shifter, and he couldn't go near the thing again while the Magician of Mars was beside it.

A bright yellow light suddenly played around Curt Newton's head. He turned, surprised. Ul Quorn was holding a tubular lamp whose yellow beam was turned on Curt's face.

"Why, what—" Curt started to ask bewilderedly in shrill tones.

Ul Quorn handed the lamp to N'Rala, its yellow beam continuing to bathe Curt's head. A triumphant flare lit the eyes of the mixed breed.

"So we finally meet again, Captain Future," he said softly.

"Are you crazy, Chief?" blurted Thikar amazedly. "That's old Xexel."

"Look at his face," snapped Quorn. "The fluoric beam cuts through the inorganic blue stain he's put on it. You can see for yourself."

Curt realized that his imposture was a thing of the past. Under the fluoric yellow beam, his own tanned face showed through the blue stain. Instantly, Curt snatched for the proton pistol inside his jacket.

Captain Future's draw was legendary in its phenomenal swiftness. But this time, Ul Quorn was swifter.

The Magician of Mars drew no weapon. Instead, he simply extended his hands toward Curt. From his outstretched fingers shot red rays of crackling energy. They struck Captain Future, and he felt a paralyzing electric shock that froze him in the very act of drawing his weapon.

"Get his gun, Thikar," snapped Quorn. "And then cover him—he'll recover in about ten minutes."

The brutal Jovian snatched the proton pistol from Curt's hand. And Curt could not resist. His whole body was paralyzed by that shock. Ul Quorn stood enjoying his triumph, a striking figure in his striped Martian turban and yellow-sleeved purple robe.

"Your famous draw is slow compared to my electrostatic finger rays, Captain Future," he mocked. "They're my newest weapon. The charge of energy comes from a compact electrostatic battery inside my robe. When

I extend my hands full length, a contact is made which allows the electric charge to flash along wires in my sleeves, and radiate from tiny wires that are attached on the under side of my fingers. You see, a weapon like this is not only swift—it enormously impresses people by its seeming magic."

Curt Newton made no answer. He could not speak, paralyzed as his muscles were by the stunning electric shock. But his gray eyes flamed.

N'RALA and Thikar, and Lucas Brewer and the other criminals had stared in amazement until now. But now N'Rala stepped forward. The dark eyes of the beautiful Martian girl were flaring as she faced Curt Newton.

"Captain Future, at last!" she breathed. "Do you know that for hundreds of nights in Mars Prison I only dreamed of a chance to kill you? And now that chance has come!"

"Let me kill the devil!" cried fat Lucas Brewer. "For four years, I sweated in Cerberus prison where he sent me!"

"Let's not kill him too quickly," growled Thikar balefully. "I know a few Jovian tortures to try on him, first."

They were like wolves crying for Captain Future's blood as they faced his stiffly paralyzed figure in the flying space ship. To them, the chance of at last destroying the great foe of crime was a dream come true.

"I am sorry to disappoint you," Ul Quorn told his followers, "but we're not going to kill Captain Future just yet."

"Not kill him?" hissed N'Rala. "What do you mean?"

The Magician of Mars smiled. "He can be useful to us, when we've returned to our own System with the treasure. Instead of killing him, I'll implant one of my brain-controls in his skull. It will make him a mindless thing completely subservient to my commands. Think of the advantage of having Captain Future himself for our tool!"

N'Rala's silvery, merciless laughter rang.

"That's even better than killing him!"

"Of course, we'll do away with him later on when his usefulness is ended," Ul Quorn added negligently. He smiled tigerishly at Curt. "You remember, it was to be no quarter between us, Captain Future."

Curt still did not move or answer, standing stiffly frozen. But he could now feel a tingle through his limbs as life began to return to his paralyzed muscles. Quorn had said it would be ten minutes before he recovered. But Captain Future's superb physique was recovering more rapidly than normal.

Yet Curt pretended still to be paralyzed, waiting for full strength to return. A plan had been born in his racing mind, as he felt the latch of the air-lock inner door pressing into his back.

"We'll implant the brain-control in his skull at once," Ul Quorn was saying. "Tie him up, before he recovers and—"

Captain Future acted! Moving speedily he ripped open the door behind him and plunged into the air-lock. He slammed the door shut and bolted it before the stupefied followers of Quorn realized it.

"Get him! Break in the door!" he heard Ul Quorn yelling.

Curt jumped toward the space-suit locker which in the *Nova*, as in most ships, was in the airlock. He snatched out a space-suit and donned it hastily, as Quorn's followers battered madly at the door.

Once he had the suit and helmet on, Curt opened the outer door of the airlock. The air in the lock at once puffed out into empty space.

"Quorn!" yelled Curt loudly. "I've opened the outer door!"

"Stop that battering!" he heard Quorn order his men instantly.

Curt Newton grinned inside his helmet. For the moment, Ul Quorn and the others were checkmated. They dared not now break into the airlock, for if they did, all air would puff out of the *Nova* at once. And they had no space-suits, for the suits were all in the locker here beside Curt.

"You can't get away, Future!" came Ul Quorn's voice, taut with venomous anger.

"Neither can you get out here at me," Curt called back.

In fact, it seemed an impasse. But Captain Future knew that Quorn's fertile brain would soon devise some way to reach him. Curt began considering his own chances for escape. He looked out the open door into space. One of the planets of the double star, the shadowed one, was not far away. He might be able to reach it by using several impellers, Curt decided.

He was fishing the impellers—tubular little hand-rockets used for individual movement in space—out of the locker, when he became aware that the *Nova* had abruptly changed course. It had turned and was now racing straight toward the nearby shadowed planet.

Captain Future instantly understood.

"That devil Quorn! He's going to land there, so they can wait for me! But I'm hanged if I'm going to be here when they do!" Curt told himself.

THE *Nova* was already screaming down into the atmosphere of the planet. Curt looked down and saw that the shadowed, semi-dark surface of the world was mantled with forests of weird, towering green vegetation.

"Here I come!" muttered Captain Future, and leaped with all his strength out of the open door of the rushing space ship. He fell at once toward the shadowy world below, hurtling down with accelerating velocity, while the *Nova* roared on in a descending slant.

Curt Newton twisted in mid-air as he fell, so that his head and hands were downward. In that position, he pressed the triggers of the two impellers in his hands.

The blast of force from the hand-rockets, jetting straight downward, slowed his fall like the brake-blasts of a space ship.

But his body rolled over in mid-air, and again began to accelerate its speed of fall. By another convulsive

effort, Curt twisted around in falling to bring himself head downward again. The dusky, weird forests were rushing up at him with frightful velocity. He fired both impellers in a blast that utilized all their stored power.

It was as though a giant hand checked him for a moment in mid-air above the forest. Then he tumbled on downward again—for fifty feet. Falling between two towering, grotesque trees, he struck the ground. The shock was partly cushioned by the thick carpet of brownish-green



Phantom Priest

moss upon the ground. But even so, it knocked Curt Newton senseless.

He recovered quickly. He scrambled out of the space-suit, tested his limbs.

He had made his body limp as he struck, and had apparently sustained nothing worse than bruises.

"Otho would have made that fall without a scratch," Curt thought ruefully. "But I feel lucky to have got by without a pair of broken legs."

He got up and looked around. The air was of high oxygen content and quite breathable, but so cold that it soon had him shivering.

"Some world!" he muttered astonishedly. "Everything seems to be frozen!"

Everything about him was wrapped in somber, frigid dusk. There was no sunlight, because the dead sun was between this world and the hot white sun. The only light was that of the stars of this alien universe.

Around Curt Newton rose a gloomy forest of great green trees with stalk-like trunks and drooping branches that bore masses of fine green tendrils instead of leaves. He had touched some of these drooping tendrils in turning and they snapped off as though of glass. They and the moss and grasses underfoot were in fact frozen to brittle rigidity.

Marveling, Captain Future stared around the uncanny frozen forest. Then he stiffened as he saw, through the trees, two large green creatures crouched motionless in a nearby glade. They did not stir, as he advanced cautiously. They were reptilian monsters, with crocodilian heads on massive, eight-legged scaled bodies. They were huddled close together on the moss. Touching them, Curt discovered that they also were apparently frozen hard like everything else on this strange world.

"A world of frozen life!" he muttered wonderingly. "These things aren't dead—it's more like some kind of suspended animation."

Then Captain Future began to understand. He perceived that this world regularly went through a period of cold night when the dead star eclipsed the white sun. The eclipse was apparently of long duration, since the dark star circled its bright companion in the same direction as that of this planet's orbit. Thus it tended to cause an eclipse of days or weeks.

"And all the life on this world has evolved to fit these conditions—all plant and animal life here goes into a weird frozen hibernation during the frigid period of the eclipse," Curt Newton thought.

He was sharply recalled from his scientific speculations by a roar of rocket-tubes. The *Nova* was slanting down to a landing nearby.

"Quorn, back after me!" Curt exclaimed. "I might have known that persistent devil would want to make sure of me!"

The *Nova* was already landing in a nearby glade. He heard the voice of Ul Quorn as the Magician of Mars and some of his men emerged.

"Spread out and beat through the forest in a line!" Quorn was ordering. "He's somewhere around here, for this is where he fell!"

Captain Future heard the criminals advancing, the frozen, brittle moss crackling under their feet. He looked around tamely. He had no weapon, and they were all armed. Concealment was his only chance. An attempt to take the *Nova* would be madness, for Quorn had left guards there.

Curt saw no place of hiding. Then his eye fell on the two frozen reptilian monsters beside him. With a sudden inspiration, he stooped and strained to squeeze in under the motionless bodies of the two monsters. He got between the two, hidden beneath their upper bodies. He crouched there, and soon heard the criminals advancing through the glade.

"Everything frozen, even the birds and beasts!" he heard Thikar muttering. "I don't like this blasted planet."

"Look sharp!" rasped Quorn's voice. "Future must be near here!"

THEY passed on, and Curt breathed easily. But they returned, beating through the glades. If they kept up, he knew they would find him.

He glimpsed a thin ray of brilliant white sunlight appear slowly nearby. The sunlight strengthened, and the air became less chill. Curt realized that the cold eclipse-night was now coming to an end.

"Back to the *Nova*—we've got to get out of here!" Ul Quorn called sharply. "This world is going to be dangerous in a few more minutes."

"But Captain Future?" protested Gray Garson.

"We'll leave him—he won't live long here!" Quorn exclaimed.

Curt heard them hurrying back to the *Nova*, and heard the ship blasting off. Simultaneously, he was aware that the reptilian bodies between which he crouched were stirring slightly. The great monsters and all the other creatures of this frozen world were wakening again to life!

CHAPTER XI

Otho's Disgrace

BACK in the city Lulanee, on Uranus, the Brain and Otho had labored for a night and a day and into the night again, to build a dimension-shifter that would enable the *Comet* to enter the other universe. They

were just completing the task, in the cabin laboratory of the little ship.

Otho stood back, his green eyes keenly surveying the mechanism they had built. It was a tangle of vacuum tubes and condensers, shielded by a copper dome supported by four quartz rods.

"That finishes it, doesn't it?" Otho asked anxiously.

"Yes, it finishes the dimension-shifter, but we must rig up a dual space sextant before we dare enter the other universe," rasped the Brain.

The Brain had worked with the thin blue tractor-beams that he could jet from his case to serve him as hands. Now he hovered on his magnetic motor beams, his glass lens-eyes closely examining their work.

"Why can't we use the dimension-shifter right now to go down to that radite cavern where we think Quorn's base is?" Otho demanded. "Maybe the chief is down there in trouble."

"Curtis can take care of himself," retorted Simon Wright. "We daren't enter the co-existing universe without a dual space sextant. We can't take a chance of appearing in either universe at a point where there is already solid matter. It would annihilate us."

"Say, that's right—I never thought of that!" Otho exclaimed.

"You wouldn't," commented the Brain witheringly. "Suppose you help out a little by going over to the space ship supply firms by the spaceport and getting a couple of space sextants and two gravitometers to hook up as a dual space sextant."

Otho jumped at the chance. The restless android was always eager to be out doing something.

"Sure, I'll get 'em right away!" he answered. "But I'll have to make up a little first, or everyone will know we Futuremen are here."

Otho was the supreme master of disguise in the whole System. His synthetic flesh could be partially softened by application of a chemical oil, then remolded into new features. He swiftly performed the miracle of make-up now. When he had finished with his stains and false hair, he was a typical yellow-skinned, black-haired Uranian space sailor.

He opened the door of the *Comet* to start on the errand. At that moment there was a roar of rocket-tubes. Down out of the night came a long Rissman cruiser with the shooting-star emblem of the Planet Patrol on its bows. It landed in the Police court in which the *Comet* was parked.

"Here come Ezra Gurney and Joan!" Otho called back to the Brain as he saw two figures hastily approaching from the newly-landed cruiser.

Joan Randall looked around expectantly as she and the old white-haired veteran marshal entered the *Comet*.

"Where's Captain Future?" she asked.

"I wish I knew," the Brain admitted. He related what had happened since they left Earth, and how they had come to believe that Ul Quorn's base was in the radite cavern deep under Uranus. "So Curtis and Grag have gone to try to reach that cavern through the great caves," he ended.

Joan's dark eyes had anxiety in them. "That's dangerous! That big red-headed idiot would try a risky stunt like that. Why didn't he wait till you had your dimension-shifter built, and go by that means?"

"Curtis was afraid that Quorn would already have gone into the other universe after the treasure, if he waited that long," Simon explained.

Ezra Gurney had listened with keen attention to the Brain's narration of events. "So that's what Ul Quorn's

after—the treasure of the other universe!" he muttered. "The treasure Harris Haines went after years ago!"

"Did you and Joan find out anything about Harris Haines' former expedition, back on Earth?" Otho demanded.

EZRA shook his white head as he told the result of the time he and the girl agent had spent on Earth seeking information for Captain Future.

"We learned mighty little," he drawled. "All we could find out was some hearsay information from people who had talked to Haines after his first expedition into the other universe. Haines had said he was goin' back into the other universe after a great treasure he'd spotted there. He was almighty mysterious 'bout that treasure. He said he'd get it if he was able to pass 'the unseen ones who guard it.' He didn't explain what he meant by that."

"Quorn would know all about the treasure and the dangers of it, since he took Haines' papers from Skal Kar," muttered the Brain.

"I'll get going after those space sextants," Otho interrupted, turning to the door. "I won't be long, Simon."

Otho left the ship-court and swung through the streets of the nighted Uranian city, toward the spaceport district. He whistled cheerfully as he strode along, unnoticed in his disguise.

He had gone but a few paces when his keen ears detected a soft trotting sound behind him. He turned. Oog, his meteor-mimic pet, was following him. The little fat white beast was trotting on his short, thick legs, and looked up confidently with his beady eyes as he came up to his master.

"Oog, you should have stayed in the *Comet*," Otho reprimed. "But I guess you're as tired of being cooped up as I am. You can come along."

Oog frisked clumsily around Otho as the android made his way through the streets. The little meteor-mimic was enjoying the outing too.

The streets of the city were crowded with pleasure-seeking throngs of the yellow Uranians. Krypton-lights

glowed cheerily along the avenues and arcades. The weird, fluting Uranian music pulsed and murmured.

Ahead lay the spaceport, from which a trail of rocket-fire curved skyward as a bulky Jovian freighter took off. Otho entered the somewhat sordid district around it. Here were mixed supply houses, offices of interplanetary shipping companies, warehouses and rowdy, noisy pleasure places patronized by the space sailors.

Otho found a supply firm and soon secured the two space sextants and gravitometers they needed. Then he discovered Oog was missing.

"Oog!" he called anxiously down the crowded, noisy street. "Where the devil are you?"

Otho went down along the street, looking everywhere for the missing pet, when he heard a loud burst of voices inside a space sailors' bar. He looked inside.

A dozen hard-bitten interplanetary sailors, Martians, Earthmen, Venusians and Mercurians, were gathered at the bar. One of them held Oog.

"I tell you, I'm not drunk!" shouted the towering Earthman who held the little animal. "He did it, and I saw it!"

With relief, Otho pushed into the place. Oog chattered with rejoicing when he saw his master.

"Say, Uranian, is that critter yours?" the Earthman asked Otho.

"Yes, he is," snapped Otho. "Where did you get him?"

"It was the queerest thing!" swore the Earthman. "I was coming along the street to this joint when I saw a big space-compass lying in the street outside that ship supply shop. I picked it up, but by the time I'd got in here with it, it had somehow changed into that critter!"

Otho comprehended what had happened. Oog had seen a space-compass in the window of the supply shop and, with his usual desire to mimic everything he saw, had transformed his unique shape-shifting body into an exact duplicate of the instrument.

But howls of derisive disbelief greeted the Earthman's story from the other space sailors along the bar.

"You were plenty drunk, to imagine a thing like that!" they jeered.

The big Earthman mopped his brow.

"I guess I must have been, at that. But look—the critter has disappeared!"

The Earthman reached a shaking hand toward one of the wine jugs.

"I do need a drink now!" he said hoarsely. "When a fellow sees a thing like—"

He suddenly emitted a yell of surprise. The "jug," as he touched it, had changed back into Oog. A babel of amazed cries went up in the room.

Otho grinned.

"It's all right. This is a meteor-mimic."

That explained it. Nearly all these far-ranging space sailors had heard of the rare asteroidal creatures with the power of mimicking anything.

"For a minute, I thought I was space-struck!" declared the big Earthman relievedly. "The drinks are on me for that one, boys!"

THE Venusians called for the swamp-wine of their native world, and the Mercurians for rock-brandy.

"Good old Earth whisky for me," ordered the Earthman, and then turned to Otho. "What's yours, Uranian?"

"Jovian fire-liquor," Otho ordered nonchalantly.

They stared at him.

"Say, that stuff's bottled lightning," protested the big Earthman. "One ounce of it, and you think a meteor's hit you. Two ounces, and you think you're a meteor yourself."

Otho nonchalantly took the glassite bottle of the colorless, most potent liquor in the System. He tilted it to his lips and drank until the bottle was empty.

"It's kind of weak, but has a nice flavor," he said blandly.

They gaped, waiting for him to collapse. Nobody had ever heard of a man drinking more than a few drops of the stuff without dropping. But the android's synthetic body was designed to possess super-normally high metabolism. He could drink almost anything without harmful results. In fact, Otho preferred a diet of pure inorganic chemicals to ordinary food.

"You think that's weak?" gasped the Earthman. "Name o' the Sun, what would you call a real drink?"

"Well," Otho answered judicially, "a glass of wine with a strong shot of radium chloride in it makes a nice beverage."

"Radium chloride?" gulped the Earthman. "I'll be blasted!"

Otho was enjoying himself. The android loved to mix with human beings while in disguise, to be accepted as one of them.

The Earthman was speaking to the waiter.

"Give my Uranian friend what he wants. A shot of radium chloride in wine."

The waiter goggled, then obeyed. The whole crowd of hard-bitten space-men watched in awe as Otho raised the concoction to his lips.

Otho had a few doubts, himself. He'd never tackled anything so strong

[Turn page]



Pepsi-Cola is made only by Pepsi-Cola Company, Long Island City, N. Y. Bottled locally by authorized bottlers.

in the chemical line, and maybe even his metabolism couldn't handle it.

"Your health, gentlemen," he announced, and drained the glass.

"I wouldn't believe it if I hadn't seen it," muttered a Venusian.

Otho felt a queer glow inside him. It seemed that for once he had taken on something that was having effect on him. He found himself a little unsteady on his feet, for the first time in his life. But he also felt a sensation of extreme warmth and well-being.

A quarter-hour later, after two more radium-chloride highballs, Otho was webbling at the bar with his arm around the big Earthman's neck. They and the other sailors were lustily but uncertainly rendering a space song, roaring out the choruses at the top of their voices.

A hand whirled Otho around. His misty vision discerned that it was old Ezra Gurney who stood there.

"Well, I'll be a son of a space-struck kiwi!" swore Ezra. "We wait for you to come back with those sextants, an' you're here gettin' crocked. It's a good thing Simon sent me after you!"

"Hello, Ezra, old pal!" cried Otho. "Have a radium-chloride highball with me. Bes' drink in the universe!"

"Radium chloride?" cried Ezra. "Holy sun-imps, is that what you've been drinking? You come with me!"

He dragged Otho out, the android calling back farewells to the crowd. The cool night air cleared the mists from Otho's brain as he and Oog followed Ezra back to the Planet Police station, and into the *Comet*. And he was normal enough to hang his head when Ezra told the Brain and Joan where he had been found.

"You've disgraced yourself, Otho!" stormed the Brain. "Curtis and Grag may be in danger, and you delay our going after them by this idiocy."

"I guess you're right," Otho muttered. "But I didn't dream the stuff would affect me like that, or I wouldn't have touched it. I was just trying to show off by drinking it. I'll never do it again."

It was a chastened and penitent Otho who helped the Brain make the finishing touches on the dual space sextant.

"If everything's ready, let's start for that radite cavern at once," begged Joan anxiously. "We don't know what's happened to Curt."

"We're going to start—we'd have been gone a half hour ago if it hadn't been for Otho," rasped the Brain.

OTHO meekly took the controls of the *Comet*, while the Brain poised beside the dimension-shifter.

"I'm shifting right over into the co-existing universe now," Simon called. "All clear on the sextants, Otho?"

"All clear," the android called back.

"Stand by for a shock, then," muttered the Brain. "Here goes."

Projecting a tractor-beam from his case, the Brain flung the switches. At once a terrific shock of force tingled through them all.

Their senses cleared. The *Comet* was now floating in an empty abyss of space, with nothing in sight but distant, burning stars.

"The other universe!" Ezra Gurney whispered awedly. "It don't seem real!"

"Start her moving, Otho," ordered the Brain. "Bring us to position 16-443—57-398—135-40 on the sextants."

Otho obeyed. He sent the *Comet* flying through some few miles of space, then stopped it at the indicated position.

"We're now at a spot coincident with the radite cavern of our own universe," announced the Brain. "I'm shifting back over."

Again they felt the terrific shock of the dimensional-thrust forces that hurled them back across the fifth-dimension gulf. Then they found the *Comet* poised inside a big, gloomy cavern.

It was the radite cave, deep in Uranus in their own universe. They saw a foaming river rushing through the center of the cave, and beside the river a small collection of metal shacks among which krypton-lights were still burning.

"That'll be Quorn's workshop!" the Brain exclaimed. "Head right down on it, Otho. Ezra, stand ready to use that proton cannon."

The *Comet* swooped down, ready for action. But the place appeared deserted. There was a big, empty ship cradle, but no one around it. Beyond it lay a small space ship.

"Quorn's gone!" rasped the Brain as they emerged from their craft. "We're too late to stop his treasure expedition into the other universe!"

"Isn't that Quorn's little ship over there?" Ezra demanded.

"Yes, but that's only the small ship stolen from Skal Kar, which he's used up till now," Simon retorted. "You can see that Quorn's been building a bigger dimensional-ship here, as we figured he would."

"Look, there's Grag and young Johnny!" cried Otho.

Out of the little ship which they were discussing had emerged two figures—the great metal robot and the tough Earth youngster.

"Where's the chief?" Otho cried to the robot.

"Gone into the other universe with Quorn's men, disguised as one of them!" groaned Grag. He told of the hazardous journey of Captain Future and himself down through the caves, and of Curt's stratagem. Grag continued, "Quorn's big new ship, the *Nova*, took off and vanished into the other universe before I could run out from hiding! I'd have done something even though the chief had ordered me to stay hidden, but there wasn't time. I've been inspecting Quorn's older, small ship to see if Johnny and I couldn't use it to follow into the other universe. But Quorn had taken the dimension-shifter out of it to put into the *Nova*."

"Curtis took a long chance, disguising himself as one of Quorn's men," muttered the Brain. "I don't like it. The Magician of Mars would be hard to fool for long."

"Then what are we waiting for?" Joan cried anxiously. "Why don't we get started into the other universe after them?"

"I've heard of girls chasing after men," drawled Ezra, "but I'll bet you're the first that ever pursued a man into another universe."

Joan paid no attention, in her anxiety and dismay. The Brain was

speaking in his metallic, incisive voice.

"We'll have to stock the *Comet* with radite before we go. The fact that Quorn fueled his ship with radite argues that it is a vast distance in the other universe to the treasure. We'll need super-power."

Grag and Otho labored intensively in the next hour, digging out masses of radite from the outcrop of blue shining mineral. Johnny Kirk valiantly toiled to help carry it into the *Comet*. Finally, the bins of the ship were crammed with the super-powered radioactive fuel.

"All right, we're starting," declared the Brain as they gathered again inside the ship. "Stand by, everybody."

He operated the dimension-shifter. As its force hit them, they passed again through a brief interval of reeling darkness.

Then, again, they found the *Comet* floating in the abysmal starry spaces of the co-existing universe. They stared at the distant, glowing stars that blazoned the firmament in an unfamiliar diadem. A dismaying fact was entering their minds forcefully.

"Now that we're in the other universe, we don't know where to go to follow Quorn and the chief!" blurted Otho.

The crushing realization had borne home upon them that they had no idea where Ul Quorn and his band had gone in this vast and alien universe.

CHAPTER XII

Incredible World



CAPTAIN FUTURE realized his peril, as the World of Frozen Life began to revive around him. He was alone and without weapons, hopelessly marooned by Ul Quorn on this dangerous planet. And

as it grew sunnier and warmer with the passing of the eclipse-night, all

the weird creatures and plants around him were emerging from their frozen hibernation.

Already the two enormous green reptilian monsters between whose frozen bodies Curt had hidden were stirring ominously. Hastily, he leaped out from between them. He darted back into the concealment of a thick grove of the green tendrill-trees. The trees and the grass and moss beneath his feet were also regaining life and were no longer brittle and frozen.

Curt Newton glimpsed the two eight-legged reptiles he had just fled from rising to their feet and yawning cavernously. To his great dismay, the scaly beasts began to sniff around the ground.

"Scented my trail!" Captain Future thought sinkingly. "And here they come!"

The two crocodilian-headed monsters were lumbering rapidly forward, on his trail. They emitted a hissing, blood-chilling roar.

Curt immediately leaped for a low branch of the towering tree under which he stood. Barely in time, he pulled himself up into its foliage. The two green monsters reached the spot where he had just stood, turned their ophidian eyes up at him. They snarled, showing appalling fangs.

Curt looked around him. Frozen birds that had been perched amid the tendrill-like foliage of the tree were now coming to life also, flying off with screaming cries. The whole uncanny forest of this strange planet was waking to life with an increasing clamor of cries.

To add to Captain Future's dismay, he discovered that he shared the tree with a giant climbing snake. Its boar-like, oily black body had a dozen pairs of very short legs, and its head was round and bulldog-shaped. Its sluggish blood apparently made it slower to awake than most life here, for it was just beginning to writhe and stir on the branch opposite Curt where it had slept.

"This tree is going to be a pretty crowded place in about five minutes," Curt thought with grim humor.

He looked sharply around. There

was no other tree near enough for him to reach by jumping. The hissing, snarling green monsters below prevented escape by the ground.

Hot white sunlight now flooded the whole weird forest. The black climbing-snake had opened filmy eyes, and was regarding Captain Future with an unwinking stare. Then the creature began to slide its massive, oily length across the tree toward him.

"If I only had my proton pistol, or an atomic bomb," Curt wished futilely. "A bomb? Say, that's an idea!"

He yanked out of his belt-kit the little fluoric hand-lamp he always carried there. Its current was produced by a tiny atomic battery. Curt began hastily working to "short" the battery.

The climbing snake was now edging out his own limb toward him. The bulldog jaws of the creature were gaping in anticipation.

Captain Future finished his hasty task. At the moment he "shorted" the tiny atomic battery, he flung it at the snake's face. The battery exploded in a brilliant little flash of atomic energy.

The climbing snake recoiled, scorched and terrified. It slid down the tree with frantic haste, and then ran away through the forest on its short legs. The green-scaled monsters below, also terrorized by the little atomic explosion, had already taken to their heels.

CURT NEWTON dropped from the tree.

"What a world!" he thought disgustedly. "And no way of getting away from it. No wonder Quorn figured that leaving me marooned here was as good as killing me."

He had seldom been in a more unpromising situation. He was a castaway on this wild, dangerous world of another universe. A fifth-dimensional gulf separated him implacably from his own universe. And Ul Quorn and his band had gone on to seek the treasure of this star.

Curt Newton considered. There was no possible means of his getting away from this planet by his own ef-

forts. Therefore, his only hope was to get someone here to take him away. And the one possibility in that direction was the Futuremen.

"Before long," Captain Future thought, "Simon and Otho will have equipped the *Comet* with a dimension-shifter. They'll go first to the radite cavern. Grag and Johnny will tell them how I came into this universe with UI Quorn's band, and they'll enter this universe after me.

"But how the devil will they trail Quorn here?" Curt realized. "There's a million stars in this alien universe—they won't know to which one Quorn has come."

He frowned as he considered that problem. There was only one answer. He must somehow get a call to the Futuremen, tell them he was here.

"And all I've got is my little pocket-televistor!" he thought hopelessly. "It wouldn't reach a fraction of the billions of miles from here to the point where the Futuremen will enter this universe!"

Curt looked up into the sky. Though the eclipse-night was passing, the brighter stars of the alien constellations still shone dimly. He knew just where in these alien heavens the *Comet* would enter this universe, when it came. He had, with his usual keenness of observation, mentally plotted the course followed in these skies by the *Nova* during its voyage.

But that point where the *Comet* would enter this universe was billions of miles away. How was he possibly to get a call across that vast distance, with only his little pocket-televistor of limited range?

His eye fell on the space-suit and two impellers which lay on the ground nearby. He had discarded them when he landed on this world. But now he saw possibilities in them, for they still contained some power.

"I should be able to build a crude amplifier to step up the power of my televistor," he thought. "But even so, it wouldn't have nearly enough range to get across that distance."

Then Captain Future's tanned face lighted up.

"But say, if I could rig up a direc-

tion-cone and beam my call in a concentrated ray toward that point in space, it might reach! It's worth trying, anyway!"

The wizard of science at once began work on the task. He carried the space-suit and impellers into a little shadowy grove. Then he took from the flat pockets of his belt the array of tiny, compact tools and instruments that had helped him in more than one dilemma.

FIRST, he disassembled the flat, oblong case of his pocket televistor. The visi-screen he tossed aside—he couldn't waste power on that. The tiny tubes and coils, he considered doubtfully.

"The power I'll have to use may blow them instantly," he thought. "Well, it's worth trying."

Curt Newton took the receiver part of the little televistor and used its little coils and tubes, by adroit re-wiring, to add to the power of the transmitter. Then he labored to hook up the atomic batteries in the two impellers, to act as auxiliaries to the tiny battery of the televistor.

Finally, with his tools he made from the flexible metal of the space-suit a direction-cone such as was used for beam-casting. This he attached to his amplified transmitter. He carefully pointed the cone toward that section of the alien skies where the *Comet* would appear if it came.

"Captain Future calling the *Comet*!" Curt spoke loudly into the transmitter. "I'm on the outermost planet of the double star at approximate direction from you of 25-122-89 degrees. My location on that planet is near equator on sunlit side. Look for my smoke signal."

Curt at once shut off his power. He had no means of knowing whether his beam had reached that distant spot in space. And even if it had, there was no certainty that the *Comet* was even in this universe.

"Still, if the time table I figured out is right, they may be entering this universe in the *Comet* any hour now," he thought. "I'll just have to keep beaming my call as long as I can."

An hour later, he sent the call

again. But as he was finishing his message, there was a sudden flash of light inside his televiser. The tubes and coils had fused into a smoking wreck.

"That does it!" Captain Future exclaimed. "Too much power, and it blew the apparatus—I should have known it would. Now if neither of my calls got them, I am sunk!"

THREE was no possibility of rebuilding the fused apparatus. So Curt busied himself in gathering dried branches and moss and building a large fire. Upon it he threw masses of green tendrils which sent a pillar of black smoke into the sunlight.

The fire seemed to throw the fierce creatures of the planet into a panic. They bolted in all directions as the unfamiliar scent of the smoke reached them.

"Well, even if nobody ever comes to see my smoke signal, it'll give me a chance to get a little sleep," Curt grinned.

Calmly, he stretched out on the ground beside his smoking fire. In an instant he was asleep.

He dreamed that the climbing snake had come back and had suddenly seized him. Then Curt awoke to sudden realization that he was no longer dreaming, that something had grabbed him.

He exploded like an uncoiling spring, in the moment he awoke. His lunging movement brought him to his feet and sent stumbling backward the figure he had glimpsed bending over him. Then as Curt's eyes cleared, he saw that it was Joan Randall he had thrust away. Beyond her, Otho and Grag and the Brain were approaching.

"I like that!" pouted Joan injuredly from where she had fallen on the moss. "I come all the way into this other universe to follow you, and when I find you, what do you do? You push me on my face!"

Captain Future laughed with relief as he picked her up and put her on her feet. He kissed her lightly.

"Joan, I never was so glad to see you. Even though at first I thought you were a climbing snake."

"Now he calls me names!" Joan declared. But in her dark eyes glimmered dancing happiness.

"Chief, we sure are glad to find you!" greeted Otho as the Futuremen came up. "We got your televiser call, though it was terribly weak. We came on and found this planet, and saw your smoke signal—"

"And found you calmly sleeping, after all the worrying we'd done about you," Joan concluded. "But where's Ul Quorn?"

"Gone on after the treasure," Curt answered soberly. "We've got to get after him at once. Come on—I'll tell you what happened once we start."

The Futuremen had landed the *Comet* in a nearby glade. Ezra Gurney and Johnny Kirk met Curt in the door of the ship. The tough Earth youngster's face wore a beaming grin.

"I knew there couldn't ever anything happen to you, Captain Future!" Johnny declared. "I wasn't worried about you like the others."

"Blast off, Grag," Curt ordered the big robot, smiling at Johnny. "Head for the nearest of the other two planets. Quorn must have headed for one of those worlds after he left this one."

As the *Comet* tore up through the atmosphere of the World of Frozen Life, Captain Future told them rapidly of how Ul Quorn had detected his imposture.

"I was afraid something like that would happen," rasped the Brain. "That Magician of Mars has lost none of his devilish cunning."

"He's more formidable than ever," Curt declared. "He's developed new weapons and powers."

"You still don't know what this here treasure is he's after?" asked Ezra Gurney keenly.

"No, but it's somewhere at this double star," Captain Future stated. "It must be on one of these other two planets. I only hope that Quorn's band hasn't already seized it and returned to our own universe."

The *Comet* was screaming through space now, away from the World of Frozen Life. The other two planets of the double star were on the other side of it. The little ship, driven by

the unprecedented power of radite fuel, cut as close as possible to the two suns in crossing over.

SIMON WRIGHT hovered by a window, observing with intense scientific curiosity the giant dead star of the pair. It was like a colossal black cinder, this sun that had burned out long before its companion. But smoldering, sullen red flames here and there on the surface of the dead sun told of dying radioactive fires in its interior.

"It's almost dead, but not quite," the Brain muttered to himself. "There must be great volcanic eruptions occasionally on its surface."

They flashed through the blinding glare of the blazing white sun, using the *Comet's* "halo" to protect it from the heat. Then they approached the nearest of the other two planets.

It was a drab world with a fairly dense atmosphere which their tester showed to be breathable. The landscape of this planet was a desolate one of rolling, moss-covered highlands sloping down to the dried-out bottoms of what had once been great oceans.

"There's some kind of ruins down in that ancient sea-bottom!" called Otho from the window.

"Land there and we'll investigate," Curt ordered Grag.

The *Comet* came to rest on the cracked, arid bed of an extinct ocean. They emerged and inspected the ruins that Otho had glimpsed.

These were crumbled stone remnants of what had once been a mighty city. Only fragmentary carvings on disintegrating stone walls, and debris-strewn streets, remained of a former grandeur.

"This city was down in the ancient sea, lad," commented the Brain. "Its people must have been a water-dwelling race, who perished when the oceans of this world dried up."

"Look at these carvings!" Joan exclaimed. "There were human beings here too—as slaves!"

The carvings were eroded by time. They showed queer, seal-like, flipper-limbed creatures who had apparently been the amphibian masters of the

city. The amphibians were shown supervising the labor of bands of slaves, who were human in every respect.

"The amphibians lived most of their lives in the watery cities, and made the human slaves work for them on land," guessed the Brain. "I'd like to know all the past history of this dead world."

"We have no time for archaeological research, Simon," interrupted Curt Newton impatiently. "The question is—is the treasure on this world and has Ul Quorn found it?"

"It's going to be a tough job searching this whole planet for Quorn, Chief," declared Otho ruefully.

Captain Future frowned.

"I have an idea for locating Quorn more quickly than that. His ship, the *Nova*, carries a heavy fuel-load of radite. Suppose we rig up a super-sensitive radite compass that will detect the presence of radite at extreme distances? We might spot him that way."

They returned to the *Comet*. It was short work for Curt and the Future-men, working together, to build a super-sensitive instrument that would detect the emanations of radite anywhere on this planet. But when they tested the instrument, its needle remained stationary.

"Quorn's ship isn't here," Curt declared. "We'll have to go on to the other planet."

When they approached the third of the three worlds of the double star, they found it a mere rock sphere without atmosphere, water or life. And the radite compass showed that Quorn's ship was not here either.

Captain Future's spirits sank to a new low.

"This double star only has three planets, and Quorn's not at any of them. Do you suppose he's already been able to secure the treasure and has left?"

"I doubt that, Cap'n Future," put in Ezra. "Harris Haines said that the treasure was dangerous to approach—said somethin' about 'the unseen ones who guard it.' If that's so, Quorn couldn't get it this quickly."

"Then where the devil is Quorn?" Otho swore. "I'm beginning to think

this mysterious treasure is a ghost treasure!"

"We'll cruise around this double star in a closing spiral," Curt decided. "The treasure, and Quorn's ship, might be on some little asteroid we haven't glimpsed. You watch the radite compass, Otho."

THE *Comet* began to fly in a tightening circle around the double star. While Otho watched the compass, Curt and the Brain swept all space with the electro-telescopes. But they were unable to glimpse even the smallest asteroid. The mystery was becoming more and more baffling.

Otho suddenly shouted.

"Chief, the compass shows radite a little outward from us!"

Curt jumped to his side. The needle of the super-sensitive instrument was twitching toward an outward sector of space.

"Head the *Comet* that way, Grag!" Curt ordered eagerly.

As the ship tore out through space, the radite compass needle showed ever more strongly the presence of radite not far ahead. Yet the telescopes failed to disclose anything but empty space in that direction.

"I can't understand this," Captain Future muttered. "Either the compass has gone crazy, or—"

"Look at the gravitometers!" Grag boomed startled. "They show a planet close ahead!"

The gravitometers on the instrument board did indeed indicate a body of planetary size just ahead. Yet there was nothing there but space!

"Curse it, all our instruments are going crazy," Otho swore.

"Grag, slow the ship down!" Captain Future ordered sharply.

Curt's racing brain had hit upon a possible explanation of the behavior of their instruments, an explanation that spelled frightful danger.

Grag had almost stopped the *Comet*, and he and the others looked at Curt inquiringly.

"The instruments show a world ahead, yet we can't see it," Curt told them. "What if it's an invisible world?"

"An invisible world?" gasped Ezra Gurney. "Who ever heard of—"

The Brain uttered a rasping exclamation.

"Curtis, you may be right! The radite compass shows that Quorn's ship is ahead. If there's an invisible world, that's where Quorn is now—that's where the treasure is!"

"I'll take the controls, Grag," declared Curt. "I'm going to fly closer to that world, if it exists, by instrument."

Cautiously, his eyes glued to the gravitometers and other instruments, Curt maneuvered the *Comet* forward. It was weird navigation. For, although the meters showed that a world was full ahead, there was nothing visible.

Then happened the most unnerving thing of all. The *Comet* and everyone in it seemed to vanish around Curt. They had become invisible too!

CHAPTER XIII

City of Unseen Men



CURT looked around, too amazed for speech. Everything—the *Comet*'s interior, his friends, even his own body, had disappeared. He could see nothing but empty space, and the stars, and the great double sun

nearby. He felt uncannily like a bodiless ghost floating alone in the sky.

Realizing suddenly that he could no longer see the gravitometer dials, Curt hastily brought the *Comet* to a stop.

"Holy sun-imps!" came Otho's incredulous cry, out of the nothingness. "What in the name of space has happened to us?"

"Is that you, Otho?" boomed Grag's bewildered voice. "I thought for a moment that you'd all left me somehow. I can't see my own body!"

"Neither can I! Nor I!" chorused Ezra and Joan and Johnny Kirk.

"Take it easy, you people," admonished Captain Future quickly. "There's nothing supernatural about this. I'm beginning to see now what's

causing it. We've found a planet which is kept invisible by some unknown force—probably some polarizing agency."

"But why should we all become invisible as soon as we get near that world?" Joan cried out of the emptiness.

"Because we're now within the field of the polarizing force," retorted Curt. "That's the only possible explanation."

"Right, Curtis," approved the rasping voice of the Brain.

"What're we going to do, Chief?" asked Johnny Kirk's voice, without a tremor.

"Ul Quorn is somewhere on this invisible world," Curt pointed out. "We know that from the compass. He and his men and his ship are totally invisible now, just as we are. Nevertheless, we're going on and find him. We're going to land on this queer planet."

"How in the name of space can you land now?" Otho's voice demanded. "You can't fly by instrument now, for you can't see the gravitometers."

"No, but I can *feel* the gravitometer needles," retorted Captain Future. "That is, as soon as I can get the glassite fronts off them."

Curt groped in his belt till he found the tool he wanted. He fumbled with it until he had removed the glassite plates which protected the navigation instruments and also the radite compass. His sensitive fingers touched the needles of the instruments, ascertaining their position.

He started the *Comet* moving forward again. His right hand held the space-stick, while his left hand flew back and forth over the gravitometers and other instruments, constantly ascertaining their bearings by the position of their needles. In the same way, he kept check on the radite compass.

"The radite compass will still lead us straight to Ul Quorn's ship," he muttered.

"Devils of Pluto, who ever heard of blind flying like this!" Otho exclaimed.

It was indeed a perilous kind of navigation that Captain Future was engaged upon. He and his invisible crew and ship were groping forward

through nothingness to an unseen world, with only his fingertips on the needles of the instruments to guide him.

The gravitometer needles showed that they were descending onto the surface of the unseen planet. Curt sweated with anxiety as he brought the ship down in a blind landing. He felt the bumping shock of contact, flung in the keel rocket-tubes to cushion it, and then had landed safely.

"Hanged if I'd want to try that stunt every day!" he breathed in relief as he cut the cycs. "Anyway, we're here. And according to the compass, Quorn's ship is close by."

Curt groped with the atmosphere-tester, detected by touch that it indicated breathable atmosphere outside the ship. He opened the door.

"Keep your proton guns handy," he advised. "If Quorn's somewhere near us, he'll have heard us arrive. Grag, stay and guard the ship."

"If Quorn is near, how the devil can we find him?" Otho demanded. "We're like a bunch of ghosts on a ghost world!"

Curt knew how the android felt. He was himself experiencing the same uncanny sensation as they emerged from the *Comet*. For though he stepped out of the solid ship onto solid ground, he still seemed in an abyss of empty space. He could see absolutely nothing but space and stars and the great twin sun!

BY feeling around a little, they discovered that they stood upon a grass-covered rolling plain. They heard sounds—the sigh of the warm wind, the distant cry of an unseen bird, the snorting grunt of an animal.

"If there're any beasts of prey around, they can scent us out and attack us before we'd even know they were here," Otho declared.

"I been rangin' space for forty years and I never saw nothin' like this!" Ezra Gurney exclaimed. "Cap'n Future, what makes it all invisible?"

"I'm sure it's such a polarizing force as I spoke of," Curt Newton answered. "A force that rearranges the atoms of any matter into a pattern which makes that matter transparent.

Just as you can make opaque sand into clear, transparent glass, simply by a rearrangement of atomic structure."

"That must be it," muttered the Brain. "We can't see each other or anything else, because everything here's perfectly transparent to light."

"How come we can see the light, then?" Otho demanded. "If our bodies are perfectly transparent to it, wouldn't it go right between the atoms of our eye-retinas, instead of striking them?"

"It does go right through our transparent retinas," Curt declared. "But light waves can affect the chemically sensitive nerve-ends of the retinas by induction, as well as by direct contact, just as an electric current in a wire can induce a current in another wire, without contact. That's why we're able to see light from outside this world."

Captain Future had brought the radite compass out of the *Comet* with him. His fingers now explored it, lightly touching its needle.

"Quorn's ship is somewhere this way," he declared, starting off. "Keep together, touching each other, and follow me. We mustn't get separated—it'd be easy for invisible men to get lost on an invisible world!"

Curt held his proton pistol in his free hand as he led the way over the rolling, grassy plain. To his eye, it seemed he was still merely floating forward in empty space.

Presently he bumped into an invisible, curving metal wall. His fingers touched it exploringly.

"It's Quorn's ship, the *Nova*!" he whispered. "Come on—we'll see if we can get inside. Be ready for action!"

They found the door of the *Nova* open. But when they groped their way into the invisible ship, they discovered that no one was in it.

"Quorn and his band must have left the ship here, to go after the treasure," Curt muttered. "Yet it isn't like the Magician of Mars to sally off on a strange planet and leave his ship open and unguarded."

At that moment, Otho uttered a choking yell out of the nothingness.

"Chief, someone's grabbed me! I—"

At that moment, unseen hands snatched at Curt Newton also. And cries from his other comrades showed that it was a general attack. Curt struck out furiously at his enemies. He didn't dare fire his weapon for fear he might hit one of his own friends. His fists smashed home against men as invisible as himself.

It was a strange conflict. Everything was still absolutely invisible—their assailants as well as themselves. Captain Future soon discovered that their attackers were not Quorn's men. These were smaller men, dressed in jackets and breeches of soft leather, who were trying to bind him with flexible metal thongs.

Curt laid about him with flailing fists. But his assailants appeared to possess an uncanny power of perception. Their movements were deft and sure despite the handicap of invisibility. A quartet of them pulled Curt Newton down and tied his wrists together. Then they hauled him to his feet.

"Chief, did they get you too?" cried Otho's raging voice. "Curse it, then they've got us all. Except, maybe Simon got away."

The rasping, metallic voice of the Brain dispelled that hope.

"They got me too, by flinging some kind of net around me before I could dart away," reported Simon. "They'd spotted me by my voice, I think."

"That's it—these fellows go by hearing instead of sight!" Curt exclaimed. "Which means they must be natives of this planet."

"I like them just 'bout as little as I like their crazy phantom world!" declared Ezra's voice. "Let go me, dang you! Where in thunder you think you're draggin' me?"

The invisible captors were forcing all of Captain's Future's party out of the ship. They could hear their captors speaking to each other, in a language that was wholly incomprehensible.

THEN came a call in that language, from a little distance. Curt heard others of the invisible race approaching, and heard Grag's angry voice.

"Grag, did they get you too?" Curt

called into the emptiness.

"Yes, they did, whoever they are!" Grag roared. "They slipped up on me when I was guarding the *Comet*. Now they've got my arms tied around my body. If I ever get loose and can see anything, I'll slaughter 'em!"

A voice among the invisible captors gave an order. Curt and his friends were all jerked forward. Points of unseen swords pricked them to emphasize the obvious command.

"Ouch!" yelled Otho. "Blast it, if I could see these devils—"

"Take it easy, and go ahead as they want us to," advised Captain Future. "We can't do anything by blind resistance, for these fellows have the advantage with their super-hearing. We'll wait our chance."

Their invisible captors marched their captives forward over the rolling grassy plain. For almost an hour they walked, finally striking a paved road. To Curt's feet it felt like a very ancient highway of synthestone that was crumbling and decaying with age.

Presently they heard their invisible captors calling to people on either side of the road, who called back. From the sounds he heard, Curt Newton hazarded a guess that they were passing through a region of cultivated fields in which numbers of the unseen race were laboring. Soon a low, pulsing murmur came to their ears from ahead.

"That sounds like a city," Otho's voice commented. He exclaimed suddenly, "Say, what do you suppose became of Ul Quorn's bunch?"

"Quorn may have been luckier than we, and evaded these phantom-men," Curt suggested. "He may have known what to expect here, from Haines' papers."

They entered the invisible city. Captain Future guessed from the babel of voices he heard that there were hundreds of the invisible race in the street. They seemed to move to and fro without blundering into each other, by means of their uncanny sense of hearing. He heard the clang of metal-workers in shops along the street, the cries of children at play.

The pavement under Curt's feet

was broken and crumbling, he felt. And when he brushed against the walls of structures, he noticed that they too were crumbled and decayed. He got the impression that the city was a once-great metropolis sinking to decay and inhabited by a primitive folk.

"A whole city and people—invisible!" Joan Randall's voice was marveling beside him. "It's almost worth coming into this alien universe to find such a wonder."

They were being taken now up a low flight of crumbling steps. The manner in which Joan's voice echoed convinced Curt that they were approaching the entrance of a building of very great size.

In fact, they soon heard their footsteps echoing louder as they entered a corridor inside the phantom building. They were taken down a staircase, and then another.

"Guess we're down in the cellar now," muttered Otho. "But there's still nothing but space to see."

A door was opened. Captain Future and his comrades were thrust through the opening. The door slammed shut and was bolted outside, and they heard their invisible captors marching away.

"Melt me down!" boomed Grag disgustedly. "I've been locked up more than once, but never before in the invisible jail of an unseen city on a phantom world!"

SUDDENLY they heard tottering steps approaching along the corridor. Then the cracked voice of an old man spoke to them through the barred door of their cell. To their amazement, it spoke in the language of Earth.

"You're the new prisoners the Phantom-folk just captured?" asked that shrill voice. "Are any of you from Earth?"

"We're all from Earth!" Curt cried to the invisible speaker. "Who are you?"

"I'm from Earth too; long ago," was the answer. "I'm Harris Haines!"

"Harris Haines!" Captain Future cried. "The man who first entered this universe?"

"Yes," replied the shrill voice of

the aged, unseen man. "I've been on this world for forty years, ever since my ship crashed in landing on it in my second expedition here."

"I'll be blasted!" muttered Otho's astonished voice. "Imagine living on this invisible world for that long!"

"I've got used to it," Harris Haines replied. "But I've long hoped that somebody would come. And today, at last, men from my own universe have come here—first the band of the man Ul Quorn, and now your group."

"Do you mean to say Ul Quorn and his crowd are here now?" Curt demanded swiftly.

"Why, yes," replied the voice of the old Earthman explorer. "They landed near the city yesterday. Some of the Phantom-folk seized them and brought them here. They're imprisoned in this same building."

"Now I see it, Chief!" Grag muttered. "These invisible devils had left a guard around Quorn's ship, and that's who captured us!"

"Who's that talking?" exclaimed Harris Haines startled. "It didn't sound like a man's voice?"

"It's not a man, but it's one of my friends," Curt reassured him. "Tell me, Haines, what are these people going to do to Quorn's band and us?"

"If they think you came to steal the Cosmic Crystal, they'll kill you all," was the old explorer's answer. "If they don't think that, they'll let you live as they have me, but will never let you go away from here."

"One sweet prospect 'twould be to spend the rest of our lives on this crazy planet," muttered Ezra Gurney.

"Phantom-folk? Cosmic Crystal?" blurted Otho puzzledly.

Haines' cracked voice explained.

"These invisible people call themselves the Phantom-folk. Ages ago, as I've learned from them, they were an ordinary visible race and this world too was quite visible. They had a scientific civilization, and had built cities like this one. But they were attacked by raiders from one of the other three planets—raiders who were of an amphibian race dwelling in the cities in the oceans of their own world."

The Brain's voice interrupted.

"Those ruins we saw on the dried-up sea-bottoms of the third planet—that was their origin, then?"

"Yes, that was the world of the Amphibians," the old explorer confirmed. "They too had developed scientific knowledge, and they were a warlike race. They built space ships, which had water-filled chambers in them, and in those ships they raided this world. They took back human captives from this world to act as their slaves, since the Amphibians could not labor on land for very long, and needed slaves for that purpose."

"The humans of this world tried various scientific defenses against the Amphibians, but none succeeded. Then the greatest scientists of this people achieved a real defense. They hit upon the idea of making this whole world and everything upon it invisible. That would make life somewhat difficult at first, but it would effectually check the Amphibians."

"The human scientists here knew much about light and matter. From their knowledge, they built the Cosmic Crystal. It was a crystal—shaped like a huge diamond, towering as high as a man. It was a perpetual transformer of cosmic energy that would make this whole world invisible."

"The Cosmic Crystal was really not matter at all, but a rigid pattern of fixed photons, as solid-seeming as matter. The convolutions of its photon-pattern were such as to form a natural transformer of energy. It sucked in the energy of the cosmic rays which penetrate all space, and transformed that energy into a polarizing vibration which radiated forth to affect all matter within its range. The polarizing vibration made all matter on this world absolutely transparent, and hence invisible."

THE voice of old Harris Haines concluded.

"The Cosmic Crystal was placed on an altar, and a temple was built around it. You are now, in fact, in the dungeons of the Temple of the Crystal. For ages, the Crystal has radiated transformed cosmic energy to keep this world and all on it invisible. Long ago, the Amphibians died

away as their world dried up, but the Phantom-folk here still keep their world invisible, to protect them. For these Phantom-folk are a *sightless* people now—their useless eyes atrophied during the ages. They live and move entirely by super-developed hearing. They are a primitive people now, for their scientific greatness faded and died. If their world were made visible, they would be helpless before any invaders."

"That's understandable," declared the Brain.

"Harris Haines, tell me," Captain Future asked quickly, "it was to get the Cosmic Crystal that you came here years ago, wasn't it?"

"Yes," answered the sad voice of the old explorer. "That was the lure that brought me to be marooned for a lifetime here. The Cosmic Crystal that can make a whole world invisible is the great treasure I was seeking. I had learned about it on my first trip here, and came back to secure it."

"And Ul Quorn learned about it from your old notes," Curt muttered, "and he and his band came here also after the Cosmic Crystal."

Otho gasped. "Then the mysterious treasure Quorn's after is that crystal that makes this world invisible? Why would Quorn want that?"

Curt Newton replied somberly.

"With that Cosmic Crystal, Quorn could make a whole asteroid or moon of our own System invisible. He could set up an impregnable citadel of crime in the heart of our System!"

CHAPTER XIV

Duel of Phantoms



CAPTAIN FUTURE could not see his companions, but he knew from their silence that they were stunned by the menacing possibility he had suggested. A treasure, not of riches, but of power!

Power to make of some world in the

System a fortress of crime which would be utterly invisible and hence invulnerable! Power that would enable the Magician of Mars to defy the Planet Police, to prey unhindered upon the life of the nine worlds!

Harris Haines' shrill voice interrupted their dark thoughts.

"I hear some of the guards coming," Haines declared. "They'll be taking you up for judgment now."

Curt stiffened. He heard invisible warriors open the cell, and then Curt and his companions, bound and helpless, were thrust outside.

"The captain says that you and the other strangers will now be judged by the Priests of the Crystal," informed Harris Haines, after a brief colloquy. "The Priests are the rulers of the Phantom-folk."

"If I could get my arms loose, I'd leave a few dead Phantom-folk around here," Grag was growling.

"Take it easy," ordered Curt Newton. "They've got us cold, and talk may do more here than attempted resistance."

Curt and his comrades were conducted through unseen corridors and up stairs into a room which he judged from the echoes to be a high, domed hall. Yet, to his eyes, there was nothing—nothing but empty space and stars and sunlight, in which he himself seemed a bodiless ghost.

A well-remembered, cool, mocking voice spoke from somewhere nearby.

"I heard that you and your precious Futuremen had been captured, Future," echoed Ul Quorn's voice. "Too bad that you walked into the same trap we did, but it makes a nice, friendly little party, doesn't it?"

Curt made grim answer to the mocking voice of the Magician of Mars.

"It's still no quarter between us, Quorn."

"Of course," drawled Quorn. "But I fancy that our invisible friends here are going to say something about our little argument."

An unseen man whom Curt guessed to be the chief of the Priests of the Crystal was now speaking in a slow, heavy voice.

Harris Haines translated.

"He wishes to question you first, Quorn. The Chief Priest demands to know why you came to this world."

"Tell him," Ul Quorn replied, "that I came with my friends to avert a great danger that threatens the Phantom-folk."

"What danger is that?" the Chief Priest demanded through Haines.

"I came," Quorn stated coolly, "to warn the Phantom-folk that these men who call themselves the Future-men were on their way here to steal the Cosmic Crystal!"

"Why, you lying space-rat!" exploded Otho. "Don't tell the priest that, Haines—it's a cursed lie!"

"I've got to translate, when they order me," Harris Haines quavered nervously. They heard him interpreting Quorn's assertion to the Phantom-folk. And they heard a fierce exclamation from priests and warriors.

"Haines, tell them this," Captain Future spoke sharply. "Tell them that the man Quorn lies—that he is a criminal who came here to steal the Cosmic Crystal and that I pursued him here to bring him to justice."

"It's your word against mine, Future," mocked the Magician of Mars. "We'll see who's the most convincing."

They heard a buzz of excited argument from the unseen priests as Harris Haines gave them Curt's statement. It continued for minutes.

"Haines, can't you assure the priests that Captain Future spoke the truth?" appealed Joan Randall. "They know you and might believe you."

"But I don't know which of you is telling the truth!" shrilled Harris Haines bewilderedly. "I've never heard of either of you."

The argument of the Priests of the Crystal came to an end. The Chief Priest spoke solemnly, and Harris Haines rapidly translated.

"The Chief Priest says that there is only one way to determine which of you two men is telling the truth. That is by trial-by-combat before the altar of the Crystal, as is the custom of these people, upon tomorrow."

"Trial-by-combat?" ejaculated Ul

Quorn's voice startled. "You mean that Future and I—"

"You two will fight it out with swords, in the great amphitheater of the temple in which is the altar of the Crystal," Harris Haines explained. "Whichever of you kills the other will be adjudged to have been declared the true man, by the Crystal."

Captain Future's voice rang eagerly.

"That suits me! I ask nothing better than a chance to settle with Quorn, man to man!"

"It suits me too," Ul Quorn answered coolly. "I always knew that some day I'd kill you, Future. This place is a fitting one for the regrettable ending of your glamorous career."

"You'll find it queer fighting," warned the shrill voice of old Harris Haines as they were taken back down to their prison. "You won't be able to see each other or anything else, remember. You'll have to fight by sense of hearing alone!"

THEY knew when "night" came by the dwindling away of sounds of activity from the temple and city. But though it was the sleep-period of the Phantom-folk, nothing had changed. The light of the white sun, penetrating through the invisible planet, made a real night impossible.

It was toward the middle of the next "day" that food was brought them, cooked herbs and roots and thin, acrid wine. A little later, they heard a file of guards approach, who conducted Captain Future out of the cell.

"Don't worry," Curt called back to his friends. "Here's where I settle Quorn's plots for good, if I'm lucky."

"Beware of tricks, lad!" rang the Brain's warning after him. "You know as well as I what a cunning devil he is at stratagems."

Captain Future was led out into what was apparently a great open space, since he could feel the wind on his face. From a great circle around him, he heard a buzz of thousands, of low, excited voices. Curt gathered that he was in the big open amphitheater of the temple in which

the duel was to be staged.

Not far from him he glimpsed a peculiar flickering radiance in the air. It outlined a large, diamond-shaped form which was thus, by virtue of its flickering radiance, the only semi-visible thing he had yet seen here.

"The Cosmic Crystal!" Curt thought. "So that's the thing these superstitious people think is going to decide between Quorn and me."

His hands were untied. He flexed his stiffened muscles to restore circulation. One of the guards gave him an invisible sword.

The heavy voice of the Chief Priest rolled out. His guards left him. The thousands of the Phantom-folk in the amphitheater became absolutely silent. They could only "watch" this battle by their super-keen hearing.

The cool, confident voice of Ul Quorn came through the dead silence across the invisible amphitheater.

"Are you there, Future?" demanded the Magician of Mars. "I'm coming to meet you."

Curt gripped his sword.

"I'll meet you halfway, Quorn," he called.

He strode forward. The floor of the amphitheater was of crumbled paving, he felt. Curt moved softly and warily, his ears tuned for every sound. He could hear Quorn's cat-like steps as the mixed breed approached. Both of them moved more softly and cautiously as they approached each other. Suddenly, Curt heard Ul Quorn rushing forward, his sword whistling.

Curt ducked sharply, and felt the sword whiz over his head. He stabbed savagely with his own weapon in the direction of Quorn's footsteps. He felt the point rip Quorn's robe, but knew he had not wounded the other.

A low whisper of intense excitement came from the Phantom-folk around the amphitheater as they heard and understood the clash.

"I always knew you were quick, Future," came Quorn's voice from a little distance. "I'm going to prove to you that one man is quicker."

Curt made no answer, but circled softly toward the other's voice.

"I can hear you coming," laughed Ul Quorn. "I wish they hadn't taken

my electrostatic finger ray battery when they captured me—I'd make short work of you."

Curt Newton rushed him, striking with his unseen weapon. His sword clashed against Quorn's. For a moment, one invisible blade rang loudly against the other. Then Quorn had darted away.

"What's the matter, Quorn?" taunted Curt. "You've talked for years of how you'd settle me if we met face to face. Why don't you do it?"

It was a weirdly incredible struggle, this duel between Captain Future and the Magician of Mars! A duel in which the two great antagonists of the System, invisible to each other, sought to bring their long feud to a climax upon this sightless world of an alien universe!

Again Curt rushed, again the invisible swords clashed. This time Quorn's blade grazed Curt's wrist. But he heard the Magician gasp and knew that his own point must have stabbed close past the mixed breed's face.

Once more they circled each other, each listening to the other's footsteps, in this fantastic death struggle. But now Ul Quorn hastily gave ground as Captain Future charged him.

"Not getting afraid, are you, Quorn?" Curt demanded mockingly.

HIS answer was the *swish* of Quorn's striking blade. Curt's own unseen sword flew up to deflect the stroke, but the flat of Quorn's weapon struck his shoulder a numbing blow.

Curt stabbed savagely, advancing straight forward. But once more the wily Magician of Mars drew away. Captain Future, resolved to finish the duel one way or another before Quorn could employ any tricks, followed him.

At that moment came an astounding interruption to the duel. It was the roar of a space ship's rocket-tubes in the sky overhead. The ship was as invisible as everything else. But it could clearly be heard as it dived, with a crescendo roar of rockets, down into the amphitheater.

Captain Future recognized the

staccato rockets of the *Nova*, Quorn's ship. He heard the blast of the keel tubes as the craft landed nearby.

"This way, Garson!" Quorn was shouting. "Here's the Crystal!"

The Phantom-folk were in wild uproar. Curt could hear men running from the *Nova* toward the flickering radiance of the Cosmic Crystal.

"So this is the trick you had in mind!" Captain Future exclaimed savagely. He plunged forward, his blade seeking Quorn in the nothingness.

His sword tore into a running man. With a scream, the man fell. But it was the voice of Athor Az, the Venusian criminal, that had screamed. Next moment, a flailing metal bar in the 'nothingness' knocked Curt flat.

He dimly heard through gathering unconsciousness the brutal voice of Thikar, the Jovian.

"I got Future! If I can find him I'll finish him!"

"No time for that!" Quorn yelled. "The Phantom-folk are pouring out on us! Carry the Crystal into the ship, quick!"

By iron will, Captain Future fought against the unconsciousness threatening him. He staggered to his feet, to glimpse the flickering, semi-visible radiance of the Cosmic Crystal moving toward the unseen *Nova*.

He heard a new voice as he stumbled forward, the shrill, frantic voice of the old explorer, Harris Haines.

"No, you can't take the Crystal!" Haines was crying. "You told me you wouldn't touch it, and I—ah-h-h!"

Haines' cry ended in a scream of agony, and Curt heard the old explorer fall.

"I got the old fool—quick, now!" UI Quorn was yelling.

Curt Newton lurched forward. The Phantom-folk were rushing toward the scene, with a howl of hundreds of furious voices.

But the door of the space ship slammed, just as Curt stumbled toward it. With a deafening roar of rockets, the invisible *Nova* took off. He could hear the receding drone of its tubes as it zoomed into the sky.

"Quorn's got the Cosmic Crystal, blast him!" Curt exclaimed.

An astounding thing suddenly happened. Slowly, mistily, everything

around Captain Future was now becoming *visible*. He could see more clearly each moment the great stone amphitheater in which he stood, the carved, empty altar, the horde of rag-ing, white-skinned, sightless Phantom-folk pouring toward him.

Captain Future understood. The Cosmic Crystal had been carried away in Quorn's ship, and the matter which its polarizing vibration had kept transparent and invisible was rapidly returning to normal visibility as its atoms came back to normal state.

Harris Haines, an old, wrinkle-faced, white-bearded Earthman, lay on the paving at his feet. Blood poured from a stab-wound in his breast.

Curt stooped beside the old man.

"My—fault!" Haines was choking. "I released Quorn's men from their cell and led them out of the city to their ship, while all the Phantom-folk were here in the temple. And I guided their ship to land here, by the radiance of the Crystal, to pick up UI Quorn."

Haines' voice was an agonized whisper.

"I did it because Quorn said they'd take me back to my own universe. But I made him promise not to take the Crystal. You see, in my years here I've come to like these Phantom-folk and didn't want to take their only protection and leave them defenseless."

The old explorer's fading eyes blinked.

"Quorn tricked me—stabbed me. It's all my fault. But I did—want to see Earth—before I died—"

Harris Haines, with the words, stif-fened. The old explorer of strange universes had ended his rovings, at last.

PHANTOM-FOLK, warriors and priests, were pouring around the empty altar in a raging mob. Their eyes, atrophied and sightless, could not see the now visible scene. But they had learned by groping what had happened.

"The Cosmic Crystal gone!" they wailed. "Now our only defense is taken from us. Now we will be at the mercy of any attackers who can see!"

Captain Future understood their

despair. While their world was invisible, they had been protected. But now that the planet was visible, they would be defenseless before any invader who could see.

"Listen!" Curt spoke swiftly to the Chief Priest. "You know now that I told the truth when I said the man Quorn planned to steal the Cosmic Crystal. But I and my friends, if you free us, may be able to get it back."

The Phantom-folk caught at the straw with piteous eagerness.

"You are free now, then!" cried the Chief Priest. "You will regain the Crystal?"

"I'll do everything possible," Curt promised grimly. "As much for my own sake as for yours. Set my friends free at once, to help me."

Guards hastened down with him into the dungeons of the temple. He found Otho and Grag and the others, now completely visible and mystified.

"Chief, what happened?" Otho cried. "We heard an uproar and then everything started to become visible again!"

Curt explained rapidly, as the Phantom-guards untied them and freed the Brain from the confining net. They listened, horrified.

"Then Ul Quorn is on his way back to our universe, our own System, with the Crystal!" cried Joan.

"Yes, and we're following him at once in the *Comet*," rasped Curt. "We've got to catch up to him before he has time to use that Crystal to set up an invisible crime-world in our System."

THE Futuremen, and Ezra and Joan and young Johnny Kirk, hastily followed Curt out of the city. They hurried across the rolling, grassy plain until they glimpsed the welcome sight of the *Comet* glinting in the light of the white sun. Then Ezra uttered a cry.

"Look at that!" he yelped. "Somethin's wrecked the *Comet*!"

The underside of the little ship's stern had been blasted open by an explosion of terrific violence.

"Quorn's men did this!" Curt gritted, his gray eyes flaming. "They

made sure we couldn't follow, by setting an atomic fuse that exploded the radite in the fuel-bin of the *Comet*."

They found that to be the case. The fuel compartment under the cyc-room was a wreck, the whole hull having been torn open by the explosion of atomic energy. Two of the cyclotrons themselves had been badly strained by the explosion, only the thickness and strength of the ship's interior walls having prevented the complete destruction of them all.

"That devil!" raged Ezra Gurney. "Now we're washed up for fair."

Curt's voice rang. "Not us! We can repair this damage."

"But it'll take days," despaired the old marshal. "An' even if you do get it fixed, we won't have any radite for fuel."

"Jumping meteor-demons!" exclaimed Otho. "Ezra's right, Chief! Without radite, we can't get back across the billions of miles to where we must go to enter our own System!"

"We'll worry about the radite when we get the *Comet* fixed!" snapped Captain Future. "Grag, you go back with Ezra to the Phantom-folk city and bring back all the high-test alloy metal you can find there. Otho, get out every atomic tool in the locker. We've no time to waste!"

There began a period of grueling labor. Hours passed, stretching into days as Curt Newton and the Futuremen toiled against time to repair their ship. Laboring almost without rest, they forged new plates to repair the *Comet's* hull, replaced torn-away fuel-feed lines, disassembled and rebuilt the two strained cyclotrons.

The Phantom-folk were eager to help, bringing metal and other materials as requested. The sightless folk showed in their pathetic eagerness that they felt Curt to be their last hope of regaining the Cosmic Crystal.

Red-eyed from lack of sleep, almost exhausted, Captain Future finally straightened from the last connection of the two rebuilt cyclotrons.

"That finishes it," he said hoarsely. "She's as good as new."

"But the radite?" Otho pressed. "Where are we going to get it?"

There's none on this world—not on any of the others around here."

"We've one chance," Captain Future muttered. "There might be radite deposits in the crust of the dark star."

"Chief, are you crazy?" cried Grag. "That dark star is boiling inside with dying fires that constantly erupt. We couldn't land there."

"We've got to land there!" Curt said emphatically. "It's the only possible source of the radite we must have to pursue Quorn. Head for the dark sun, Grag!"

CHAPTER XV

Crime Citadel



BLACK, monstrous and heaven-filling bulked the dead sun as the *Comet* neared it. Long ago, the fiery gases of the aging star had cooled to liquidity. Then as the eons passed, a cindery black crust had formed

over the dying star.

Now, this old sun had gone far forward on the road of death. But within its hardened crust there still pulsed dying fires. Here and there at many places in the gloomy black valleys and ashen plains of its surface there still burned the sullen red fires of erupting lava from its molten heart.

As Grag brought the *Comet* to a hovering position over the dark orb, all in the ship except Captain Future and Simon looked down with awe.

"Ghastly-lookin' place," muttered old Ezra. "There's somethin' about the dyin' of a great star that sort of chills you."

Curt and the Brain were intently scrutinizing their super-sensitive radite compass. The others turned, and waited tensely for the verdict that would mean release or imprisonment in this alien universe.

"There is radite in the crust of this dying sun!" Curt Newton exclaimed jubilantly. "Head northward, Grag—the needle points that way."

Over the cindery black plains and valleys and the ominous red witchfires of erupting lava, Grag steered the ship. Finally, they reached a point at which the needle of the radite compass pointed straight downward.

"Cursed if I see any radite down there!" Otho muttered. "Nothing but hardened lava and ashes and firegeysers."

"The radite's there, but it must be buried beneath the surface of the crust," Captain Future declared.

The needle of the radite compass pointed down at a shallow valley along which dozens of fountains of molten red lava spurted upward.

"We'll have to use our heavy proton guns to blast open the surface and uncover the radite," Curt stated.

"I don't like it," declared the Brain. "It might stimulate a terrific eruption."

Curt shrugged. "It's a risk we'll have to take. Help me, Otho."

Curt and Otho manipulated the two heavy proton guns of the *Comet*. Powerful blue beams of force slanted down from the hovering ship and blasted the cindery black rock of the valley, churning and destroying it.

Cracks opened in the valley floor, beneath the impact of the beams. Red fire gushed from those cracks as the lava underneath boiled upward. But finally, the beams uncovered a blue-shining mass of rock.

"Hold it!" Curt cried to Otho. "There's the radite—and lots of it! Land the ship, Grag, and you and I and Otho will get the stuff."

The *Comet* came to a landing on the valley floor near the radite deposit that had been uncovered. Curt and Otho had donned space-suits, and they and Grag now passed out of the ship. The great robot carried atomic drills and leaden containers to hold the precious radioactive fuel.

Curt led the way toward the radite. The scene around them was enough to daunt even the Futuremen. The black cindery ground that crunched under their feet, the geysers of red fire seething up from new cracks and openings all around them, made them imagine they were in a nightmare inferno.

"Devils of Pluto, I don't like walking on a sun—even a dead one!" Otho called through the space-suit phone. "It gives me the creeps."

"Look out!" Captain Future warned. "There's an eruption ahead!"

Flaming red lava had suddenly burst up from a fissure just in front of them. They ran hastily aside, and detoured around the dangerous spouting fire-fountain. More urgently, they pressed on toward the radite.

In a few moments the trio were laboring at the deposit of blue-shining rock. As fast as Curt and Otho dug out the radite with the atomic drills, Grag carried it in great loads over to the *Comet*.

The cindery rock heaved under them, and a few hundred yards from them there burst forth another of the appalling fire-geysers. It was accompanied by a rumbling roar, like the warning voice of the dying sun.

"This whole valley is going to erupt because we disturbed it with our proton beams!" Curt cried. "Quick, back to the ship! We have enough radite."

They were not a moment too soon. Even as they tumbled inside the ship, and it drove upward with a roar of rockets, the whole floor of the valley they had toiled in was cracking and breaking out in red flame.

Curt supervised the pouring of the precious radite into the fuel bins. Then he gave Grag the course to steer. The *Comet* hurtled with mounting velocity through the spaces of the alien universe, toward the spot where they must be when they shifted back into their own System.

"Quorn's got a long start on us," Otho pointed out pessimistically. "By this time he's probably used his Cosmic Crystal to set up his invisible world somewhere in the System. How the devil are we going to find it?"

Curt Newton nodded.

"It's going to be hard," he admitted. "But one way or another, we have to trail him down."

DRIVEN by the blast of energy from the super-powered radite fuel, the *Comet* plunged at a speed approaching that of light through the

alien spaces of the strange universe. Hour followed hour as they hurtled across the billions of miles which could never have been crossed with ordinary fuel.

At last, Captain Future brought the ship to a halt. He and Simon carefully consulted the dual space sextant.

"We've reached the spot in this universe coincident with the Solar System in our own universe," Curt told them. "Stand by—I'm going to shift back over."

He operated the dimension-shifter machine. As the burst of force from it hurled every atom in the ship and themselves across the narrow but unthinkable abyss of the fifth dimension, they all experienced the familiar sensation of being hurled through shrieking blackness. Shaken, as always, by the terrific shock, they gradually came to themselves.

The *Comet* was back again in their own universe! The little ship was floating in space at a point inside the orbit of Uranus. Far away shone the familiar face of the Sun. In the starry heavens blazoned the familiar constellations.

"Am I glad to be back here again!" Joan Randall cried in relief. "I want no more alien universes, for mine."

"Now how're we going to find Quorn, Chief?" demanded Otho.

Captain Future had given that matter thought during the voyage.

"Quorn would undoubtedly take the Cosmic Crystal to some small little-known world in the System, either a moon or asteroid," Curt declared. "The Crystal would make such a world totally invisible, and make it an ideal and invulnerable stronghold for Quorn's cutthroat band. We'll have a look."

With the powerful electro-telescopes of the *Comet*, Curt and the Brain rapidly checked the thirty-one moons of the System.

"All the moons are as visible as ever," he reported. "That means that the Magician of Mars has chosen an asteroid."

"And that means we'll never find him!" groaned Otho. "Why, there's hundreds upon hundreds of asteroids

in the zone between Mars and Jupiter. One of those swarming little worlds could be made invisible and would never be missed. Most of that jungle of worldlets hasn't even been explored."

Captain Future was feeling the dismay that was reflected on all their faces. But the wizard of science refused to feel daunted.

"There's only one thing to do," he said incisively. "We have in our astronomical file here, a record of the orbit, dimensions and movement of nearly every asteroid. We'll have to compute where each asteroid *should* be right now, and then check with the telescopes to see if it's there. If one of them is missing, we'll know that's Quorn's invisible crime-world."

"Holy sun-imps!" cried Otho, appalled. "That'll take weeks, maybe months—to compute the position of each asteroid, and check it!"

"We can cut the time required by using the mechanical integrals to help figure the orbits," Curt Newton replied. He added grimly, "I know it's going to be a terrific job. But we've got to find Quorn before his powers grow too great."

There began one of the most formidable scientific tasks which had ever been attempted. Only the Futuremen would even have dreamed of computing the exact present position of hundreds on hundreds of asteroids. For only they had the file of data on which to base any calculations. And despite the aid of mechanical computers, the job would be a gigantic one.

Ezra Gurney took the controls of the *Comet* and steered it toward the asteroidal belt, between Mars and Jupiter. Joan and Johnny Kirk remained silent, watching almost in awe as the Futuremen worked.

CURT had instituted a routine process. Otho took from the file the card upon which was the data about each asteroid, and noted down the elements of its orbit and the possible perturbing gravitational influences. Captain Future and the Brain, working together in complex mathematical cooperation, computed from

that data the exact present position of that asteroid. And Grag, with the telescope, checked to see if it was really there.

They reached the asteroidal belt, and hovered high above that whirling wilderness of booming planetoids and meteor swarms. Hours passed. The tremendous task went on. Curt and the Brain were like two machines as they unceasingly computed from the data that Otho handed them.

"Check," monotonously announced Grag every few minutes, from the electro-telescope. Another asteroid had been accounted for.

"They can't do it," whispered Ezra Gurney to Joan. "Even the Futuremen can't check every asteroid in the zone!"

The hours dragged on. Curt Newton refused to halt work to rest. Every fiber of his brain was concentrated upon the terrific task.

"Chief, here's one that doesn't check!" Grag called suddenly.

Instantly, Curt and the Brain and Otho darted to the telescope. Captain Future glanced at the position he had computed, then peered long.

"We've got it!" he said hoarsely. "The little asteroid Syrinx has disappeared. That means that Quorn has taken the Cosmic Crystal there!"

"Syrinx?" echoed Ezra Gurney. "I remember that worldlet. Space pirates had a castle on it in the old days, before the Patrol cleaned them out. It's only a twenty-mile ball o' rock, but it's got an atmosphere."

"Quorn's made it his invisible crime citadel," Curt declared. His haggard, tired eyes gleamed. "We're going there, at once."

He took the pilot chair and headed the *Comet* across the zone toward the computed position of the invisible asteroid.

"They'll surely see us approaching!" Ezra warned. "The Magician of Mars will be taking no chances, Cap'n Future!"

"We're going to use a stratagem to get onto that asteroid without him suspecting," Curt informed. "Watch."

Curt touched a big red knob on the instrument-panel. In response, clouds of shining ions burst from the rocket-

tubes of the ship. They enveloped the *Comet* in a glowing, concealing cloud from which a long shining tail swept backward. They made the ship utterly resemble a small, real comet.

"This camouflage will keep Quorn from suspecting we're near," Curt explained rapidly. "Simon, you take the controls and drive the ship close to the invisible asteroid. As you pass the asteroid, Grag and Otho and I will drop on it in our space-suits. We'll become invisible ourselves as soon as we're within the Crystal's aura."

"You mean that we others just go on past, and let you three fight it out there with Quorn?" cried Ezra rebelliously. "Not much, we won't!"

"It's an order!" snapped Captain Future authoritatively. "We three can settle with Quorn. He only has a half dozen or so men left."

The shining little pseudo-comet curved through the planetoids and meteor swarms of the zone, toward the position of the invisible asteroid. The Futuremen were staking everything on the accuracy of their calculations. Meanwhile, Curt had prepared a roll of fine gauze of dull gray metal.

The camouflaged *Comet* passed a few score miles above the position of invisible Syrinx. Curt and Otho had their space-suits on, and were waiting in the air-lock with Grag, who needed no suit. Curt gave a signal, and the three leaped out of the camouflaged ship.

They fell straight downward, pulled by force of the invisible asteroid. Beside the peculiar roll of gray metal gauze he had prepared, Captain Future had the radite compass slung over his shoulder. In his free hand he held an impeller, and Grag and Otho had hand-rockets also.

They fell toward what seemed mere empty space. But, suddenly, Curt Newton and the two Futuremen became wholly invisible.

"We're in the Cosmic Crystal's range!" Curt called on the space-suit phone. "Our calculations were correct. Start braking your fall!"

With the impellers, they slowed their plunge downward. A few mo-

ments later, they alighted with a little shock on an invisible rock plain. They had landed on Syrinx, its slight gravitation making the shock light.

Curt fingered the invisible radite compass, to learn which way its needle pointed. It would point toward the radite left in Ul Quorn's ship.

"Come on," he whispered. "This way. Keep close beside me."

Like disembodied phantoms, the Futuremen moved across the invisible asteroid toward their final reckoning with the Magician of Mars.

CHAPTER XVI

Solar Funeral-Pyre



THE three comrades moved over a barren surface of rock, feeling their way cautiously. Far up in the void they could see the little shining comet of their camouflaged ship receding.

Captain Future stopped every few minutes to check the radite compass by feeling its needle. The needle was now pointing very strongly ahead, attracted by the radite fuel left in Ul Quorn's ship, the *Nova*.

"Go slow," he muttered to the others. "We must be very near the old pirate castle where Quorn has made his headquarters. At least, we're near his ship."

"I hear someone in front of us!" Grag announced in a low voice.

Curt Newton stiffened, listening. He, too, now heard heavy steps crunching the rocky plain somewhere close ahead of them. *Approaching steps!*

"One of Quorn's men!" Curt whispered. "He can't see us any more than we can see him. Wait till he's right to us, and then jump him."

The heavy steps came closer. The Futuremen tensed to attack the invisible other. But the heavy footsteps halted, only a few yards away.

"Captain Future, I've got you and your two Futuremen covered with an atom gun!" rang a gloating voice. "I can see you, you fools!"

"That's Lucas Brewer's voice!" exclaimed Otho wildly. "But he can't see us—he's lying—"

Lucas Brewer laughed, out of the nothingness.

"You imbeciles, do you think you can match scientific powers with the Magician of Mars? I can see, and you can't. I was on guard outside the citadel and saw you coming, and could have killed you before now, but wanted you to know who killed you before you died. It's me, Brewer, that's killing you, Captain Future!"

Curt Newton knew that by some hell-born magic of Quorn's science, Brewer could see them, while they were unable to see anything. He knew Brewer was going to release a bolt of atomic energy on him.

Curt acted. He still carried the impeller hand-rocket in his hand. He touched its stud, and the blast of force from the tube sent him hurtling forward like a human projectile to the location of Brewer's voice.

He heard Brewer yell and felt the crash of an atom gun's discharge past his cheek. Next instant, Curt had collided with the other. The fat Earthman tried to turn his atom gun on Curt, but Captain Future swiftly knocked the gun-muzzle back.

Next moment, the blast of the gun was followed by a gurgling groan from Brewer. The fat criminal sank prone. Curt, examining him with searching fingers, discovered that his own gun-blast had torn into Brewer.

"Hell's-imps of Jupiter!" Otho was swearing. "What happened?"

Captain Future told them. Curt's fingers had found that Brewer wore a pair of big-lensed spectacles. He put them over his own eyes.

At once, Curt could see. By a dusky light quite unlike ordinary light, he could make out the dead body of the criminal, the rocky plain on which they stood, and Otho and Grag beside him.

Curt looked ahead. From the barren rock plain rose an ancient castle of black stone, with a looming tower.

Near it was parked Quorn's ship, the *Nova*. Atop the castle tower, there dimly shone a spherical object from which emanated the strange light.

"Quorn has illuminated this part of the asteroid with black light!" Curt exclaimed. "Light that's beyond the ordinary spectrum, that can't be seen except with such spectacles as Brewer was wearing. To everyone except those who wear such spectacles, this world is invisible."

"Melt me down!" exclaimed Grag. "We might have known the Magician of Mars would figure out a way to avoid not being able to see, himself, on his invisible world."

They crept forward toward the old pirate castle, Curt leading the way by virtue of his ability to see. Apparently, Lucas Brewer had been the only guard on duty outside. Curt approached a window of the castle.

HE peered inside. Ul Quorn sat at a table, with N'Rala beside him. The Magician of Mars was explaining something to Thikar, the Jovian, Lu Sentu, and his three other remaining criminal followers.

"It'll be the most daring theft in the history of the System!" Quorn was saying. "And it'll be easy, with this new weapon—"

Captain Future drew back from the window. He looked up, and saw that from the windows of the tower flickered a queer radiance.

"The Cosmic Crystal is up in the tower," he told Grag and Otho in a rapid whisper. "I want to get to it first. Grag, you feel your way to Quorn's ship and sabotage it so they can't escape. Wreck its dimension-shifter mechanism and cyclotrons thoroughly."

Grag moved off on the mission, Curt having set his steps in the right direction toward the *Nova*. Then Curt turned to the android.

"Otho, we've got to get up into the tower without Quorn's knowing it. There's a window twenty feet above us. Can you jump it blindly?"

"I think so," muttered Otho. "Get me set right, and I'll try."

They were beneath the tower wall, on the other side of the old castle

from the chamber in which Quorn's band was conferring. Curt carefully placed Otho in the correct position. Then the android sprang upward. His rubbery form bounded up and he blindly grabbed and caught the edge of the window above. Quickly, the android unbuckled his belt. With it he hauled up Curt.

Curt found himself in the chamber of the Cosmic Crystal. The giant, diamond-shaped thing of pure photons had been mounted on a pedestal in this room. The stone walls and roof could not interfere with the penetrating cosmic rays from which the Crystal derived its energy.

"Get ready for action, Otho!" Captain Future warned. "All hell is going to break loose!"

"But I can't see anything!" Otho protested, drawing his weapon.

"You'll be able to see in a moment."

Curt unrolled the great sheet of gray metal gauze he had brought. The gauze was of a synthetic dielectric metal absolutely impervious to cosmic rays. Swiftly, Curt flung it over the Cosmic Crystal.

The Crystal was screened from the cosmic rays which provided its power, now. And the polarizing vibration from the Crystal which kept all this asteroid invisible was stopped. The black stone walls of the old pirate tower became rapidly visible around Curt and Otho. Curt ripped away the spectacles he no longer needed, drew his own proton pistol.

"I can see now, Chief!" Otho exclaimed eagerly.

"Listen!" Curt ordered. From the room below had come a loud babel.

"Everything's visible again!" Ul Quorn was crying startled. "Something must have happened to the Crystal. Come on!"

They heard Quorn and his band come racing up the stairs to this tower-room. Then the Magician of Mars and his criminals stopped, frozen with appalled surprise. Curt and Otho faced them with leveled proton guns.

"Captain Future!" screeched Lu Sentu.

"Get him!" raged Quorn, flashing out his atom pistol.

Proton beams and atom flashes criss-crossed in the dusky tower chamber as Curt and Otho and their enemies pulled trigger. Curt felt a blast from Quorn's gun sear his shoulder. But his own proton beam had sent Thikar, the Jovian, and the Plutonian beside him stumbling to the floor.

With a curse, Ul Quorn darted back down the stairs. Lu Sentu and the remaining two criminals raised their hands in terror.

"Don't kill us!" yammered the Mercurian. "We surrender!"

"Hold them, Otho!" yelled Curt. "I'm going after Quorn!"

Captain Future plunged down the black stone stairs. He emerged from the tower onto the rock surface of the asteroid.

Quorn and the girl N'Rala were running toward the *Nova*. Grag, his sabotage of the ship interrupted by the uproar, came charging out of it toward Ul Quorn.

The Magician of Mars had exhausted his atom pistol in the fight in the tower. But Quorn extended his hands toward Grag.

RED electrostatic finger rays flashed from Quorn's hands and struck the great metal robot. Grag staggered back, stunned by the shock.

Captain Future was plunging forward, gun in hand. But Quorn and N'Rala had already entered the *Nova*. Next moment the space ship took off with a scream of tortured rocket-tubes and vanished into the sky.

"Grag, are you all right?" yelled Curt, bending over the robot.

Grag staggered to his feet.

"All right—now," he managed to say. "Those rays from Quorn's hands deranged my electric 'nerves'—stunned me."

The robot saw the ship was gone.

"Quorn's got away! And it's my fault. I'd finished wrecking the dimension-shifter in the *Nova*, but before I could smash the cyclotrons, I heard Quorn running toward the ship."

"It's not your fault—it's mine, for forgetting Quorn's electrostatic finger rays," Curt accused himself. "But I didn't think he'd have prepared a

new battery for them so soon, after the Phantom-folk took his former apparatus."

Otho came bursting out of the old pirate castle. "I tied up Lu Sentu and the rest, Chief! But Quorn and N'Rala have got away?"

"Yes, but they won't get far!" rang Curt's voice. "They can't shift their ship into the other universe for refuge, for Grag wrecked the dimension-shifter. And Simon will be bringing the *Comet* back here now that he sees this asteroid has become visible again."

In fact, the *Comet* soon roared down onto Syrinx. Curt and his comrades tumbled aboard. They explained swiftly what had happened.

"Call Planet Patrol Headquarters, Ezra!" Curt cried. "Ask them to watch for Quorn's ship and notify us which way it's heading."

The Patrol report came soon. "Space ship *Nova* sighted heading Sunward past Mars' orbit! We gave chase, but it was too fast for us."

The *Comet* roared out of the asteroid zone and flew Sunward in that general direction. Soon another Patrol cruiser reported.

"Ship *Nova* sighted ten million miles inside Earth's orbit, flying four degrees Sunward!"

"Quorn's driving to slip around the Sun and across the System!" Captain Future guessed. "He's probably got some refuge on the other side of the System he's heading for. We've got to overtake him first!"

The nine mighty cyclotrons of the *Comet* thundered and threatened to tear loose from their foundations as they were pushed to the limit. Pouring incalculable energy from the super-powerful radite they disintegrated, they drove the little ship in through the System like lightning.

They were inside Mercury's orbit and the Sun was a colossal sphere of yellow fire across the firmament, when Otho yelled and pointed.

"There he is ahead, Chief!"

A black speck ahead resolved itself into the fleeing *Nova*, as Curt drove the *Comet* closer after it. He grabbed the televiser mike, snapped on the solar filter, and shouted into it on an

all-wave range.

"Ul Quorn! This is Captain Future speaking. You can't escape us. Will you surrender?"

DUT of the televiser came the cool, mocking laugh of Quorn.

"Surrender? You must be dreaming to think I would. This was to be no quarter, remember?"

"No quarter, then!" gritted Curt. "We're bearing down on you! Stand by the proton guns, Grag and Otho!"

"Quorn's clear crazy!" Ezra was shouting wildly. "Look, he's headin' right into the Sun!"

It was the truth. The *Nova*, moving at nightmare velocity, was hurtling into the vast glow of the solar corona, into unimaginable heat.

That heat was almost overpowering in the *Comet* itself, by now. They knew it must be actually buckling the plates of the ship ahead, which was far deeper in it. Yet Quorn's craft was plunging straight on.

Curt Newton, his mind awhirl, yelled again into the televiser.

"Ul Quorn! You're running into death! Turn back and surrender!"

Quorn's voice, calm and ironical to the last, came from the televiser.

"Sorry, Future—but N'Rala and I prefer this to execution by the System Government. I always did want to go out in the grand manner."

Curt brought the *Comet* to a halt. Already the air was stifling. They could not have gone further into the solar corona without danger.

They watched in awed silence as the *Nova* sped on and on into the fiery outer atmosphere of the great solar orb. They finally saw Quorn's ship flare into a pinpoint of burning light. Then it was gone.

"An' that's the end of him," muttered Ezra Gurney incredulously. "The end of the Magician o' Mars!"

"Even now, I can't entirely believe it!" Otho cried. "Not unless I saw his dead body before me could I believe. But it must be so."

"Yes, Quorn's gone," Captain Future said, slowly and somberly, gazing with dark, bleak face at the mighty flaming orb. "And somehow, I can't feel entirely glad. He was

evil—but he was great. So great that, for a funeral-pyre, he had to have the Sun itself!"

IT was much later that the *Comet* swept down through the soft night of Earth to land upon the tip of Government Tower in New York.

Captain Future had made a final trip into the other universe. He had taken the Cosmic Crystal back to the Phantom-folk. The sightless race had hailed him as their savior for returning their invisibility protection.

Ezra Gurney opened the door of the ship. But Johnny Kirk hung back to make a final earnest plea to Curt.

"Gee, Captain Future, have I got to go to that school before I can be a real Futureman?" he pleaded.

"I can't have a Futureman who doesn't know his stuff, Johnny," Curt answered soberly. "That's why I want you to enter the Planet Patrol Academy and get an education."

"All right, if you say so," Johnny reluctantly agreed. His face bright-

ened. "But I'll still be a Future-Futureman, won't I? None of the other kids at that sky-cop school will be able to say that!"

Joan Randall lingered as Johnny followed old Ezra out of the ship.

"Aren't you going to report to the President?" she asked Curt.

He smiled at her. "You do it, nuisance. We're going home."

"You wouldn't take a girl along?" she asked half-seriously.

Curt grinned.

"Maybe some day, if she can stand life on the Moon. Some day when there aren't so many criminals to keep a fellow busy."

The *Comet* roared upward, vaulting into the skies toward the full Moon. Joan watched it disappear. Then she smiled to herself.

Soon, she knew, an emergency would arise that would require the flashing of the North Pole beacon light, the summoning of the Futuremen. It would not be long before she saw Captain Future again!

Next Issue's Novel: THE LOST WORLD OF TIME

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Memos on Mercury

By EANDO BINDER

Author of "The Impossible World," "Science Island," etc.

Ace Newsman Wyrick Uncearths Injustice on the Hottest Planet—and Nearly Gets Himself Frozen Off His Paper!

HISTORY is generally the process of adding one trivial event to another trivial event, until something big breaks. And often it starts with a small matter like the following radiogram:

Kranto, Twilight Territory,
Mercury
Interworld Radiograph
Service

May 22, 2061. Noon.

Charles H. Brown
Managing Editor
Multiplanetee News
New York City, Earth

Bonskosk, Chief:

Which, in the local patois means Good morning, Hello, Howdy, Cheerio, Have-a-Drink, How's-your-liver . . . Take your pick, Chief. The natives have only two hundred basic terms—grunts would be more descriptive—to take care of all their lingual needs.

Well, Chief, this is your Extraterra Correspondent reporting from Kranto's ritziest hotel, supposedly air-conditioned.

"Just like on Earth," says the manager. I don't think he's ever been on Earth.

Kranto lies in the middle of the narrow ten-mile strip running around the planet, in which conditions are half-way between. When the wind blows from the night-side, the temperature dips thirty degrees in ten minutes—enough to make false teeth on the table chatter, like the old guy's in the next room. When the Hot Winds have their turn, man, it feels like you're stoking coal in the Sahara.

So here I am, sitting at my typewriter, my fingers purple-cold one minute, my chin dripping like a spigot the next.

"Just like on Earth!" *Ransmurl!*

Which is a Mercurian cuss-word that covers all the cuss-words in the Milky Way galaxy and ten others. But what the devil, never let it be said Aston Wyrick balked at personal discomfort.

"Get the news!" That's the good old slogan our ilk has followed since the first scoop-hound, back in the early twentieth century, chased a fire-truck.

IT took me three days to get acclimated. Don't squawk, Chief. I wrote some stuff you can use in the Poet's Corner. I took the regular sight-seeing tour the fourth day with the others in our party, to the famous mines. They put you in a fairly decent asbestos sealed-suit, whisk you there by monorail, and put you under a liquid-air spray every hour.

Did I say something about heat before? The mines are about five miles from Twilight Territory, right at the edge of Hades itself. Surface temperature 267 degrees Centigrade. Sun's so bright you can't look up, even through the smoke-glass visor. And don't step in puddles, they warn you. It's not water or mercury—it's molten lead, oozing out of the rocks from below!

The mines are cool, only 95 degrees (203 Fahrenheit, of course). To the leather-skinned natives, it is cool. I hear they shave by rolling a red-hot iron across their chins. I gave one of them a drink of brandy—medicinal brandy, Chief—and darned if he didn't shiver. He gave me a taste of some native stuff. If I'd taken a real swallow, my brother on Earth would have got drunk.

Anyhow, it's a grand thing, this great network of mines, which is the industry Mercury is most noted for. As the guide explained, eighty-seven per cent of the System's metal sup-



plies come from the Mercurian mines. Most of it is found in virgin form on this unweathered world. Since its cooling, no extensive seas or atmosphere dissolved or jumbled it all up as on the other planets.

There's a deposit of tin that they haven't found the end of yet, though they've bored ten miles. Further details in my official report, coming to you later by radio-cable. You have no idea how tremendous the industry is, Chief. Wait till you see my radioed pix. -

Here's another item I just got from Orby. In the last forty years, Mercury has shipped ten times more gold to Earth than Earth ever had.

By the way, guess who's here on Mercury? Doctor Ronson Halbert, late of Earth! The same guy who was exiled for the atomic explosion that

blew up half of the city of Fort Wayne, Indiana. He has some official capacity here. I'll check him further.

Will click off now before you have a stroke over the cost of this by radiograph.

Rick

THEN, of course, we find the second trivial event added to the first:

Aston Wyrick
Kranto, T.T., Mercury
May 22, Midnight
Dear Rick:

You crazy fool, stop sending me drivel. I want something printable. I want a story. I want human interest. Who cares how much manganese ore was shipped where and when, or how many new shafts the Mercury Development Commission opened in the

past ten or a million years?

I know what you did. You just copied off some company propaganda about the mines. And the rest of the time you loafed around, writing poetry.

You're on a planetary tour, revealing to our millions of readers the life on other worlds. Life, understand? Get going. It's only because you used to be the ace newsman on our staff that I'm not firing you this second. But auld lang syne can't last forever. Get me?

Who in blazes is Orby?

Brown

May twenty-third. Noon.

Dear Chief:

Human interest is what you want? How's this? They're having a sit-down strike at Mine Number Eighteen! Remember the sit-down strikes, Chief? It goes way back to the early twentieth century, when Capital and Labor couldn't agree on whether the common man was entitled to a living or not.

How the Mercurians hit on that, I don't know. Maybe they read Earth history. Anyhow, there they sit and sit, demanding— But guess what they're demanding? More heat! They claim they are working under conditions of bitter cold. It's only twice as hot as a sizzling summer day in New York. They want the company to install heaters down below to get the temperature up to a comfortable 120, which is normal to these fire-eaters.

You see, Chief, the interior of this planet, since it was so small, has cooled completely through the ages. Underground, there isn't much heat beyond what seeps down by conduction from the superheated surface. Down about a mile in the mines, it has lessened to a frosty 95 degrees, which makes the poor Mercurians' fingertips blue.

So there they sit, freezing, waiting for action by their union. I was down there for an hour. Took some pix of them. They want more heat, and here I was perspiring like a human heat-wave. Good thing the sealed-suit I wore was sponge-lined. And the solidified carbon-dioxide packing helped a bit to keep my personal surround-

ings down below boiling. But I suffered for *Multiplaneteer* and you, Chief, to get the news. I'm that kind. Details and pix will follow.

Dr. Ronson Halbert seems to be employed in an experimental mine here-about. I'll have to look it up, might be an item.

You ask about Orby. Orby is Orby Tillson, one of the members of our tour-party. We met on the liner coming here and found out we were practically neighbors. Orby is from Los Angeles. Out in space, when you travel millions of miles, it feels like that.

Got back to the hotel from the mines as fagged as though I'd lived in Death Valley for a month. But a shot of their super-vodka and a little poetizing did me an asteroid of good. How do you like this couplet? It's one of my best, I think.

Through the star-spangled void we flew,
Together in eternity, we two.

Walking down the hall here, I keep hitting the ceiling at every step. Drat this light gravity! They have the ceilings padded, of course, in an Earthian hotel. Food is beastly. Most of it is sun-baked, or sun-fried, to a delicate bricklike quality. When I gnaw on it, I feel like a jellyfish nibbling toast. So you have to soak it in some soup they serve that smells stronger than day-old news. Hope you are the same.

Rick

MAY TWENTY-THIRD, Mid-night.

Dear Rick:

Stop your infernal grumbling—at five cents a word. It's costing *Multiplaneteer* fifteen dollars a day, plus extras, to keep you at the best hotel, and you complain.

The sit-down item is a little better. But you took some awful pix. On your toes, man! Give the best that's in you. And if you're spending too much time gravitating around a bottle and your vile poetry, snap out of it. Sending me that rheumy couplet, of all things, and at five cents a word!

I'm warning you. When I picked you up, Wyrick, you were rhyming

and running. You'll find yourself doing that again—at your own expense—if you don't produce. Items, man, news! Extraterrestrial Correspondent Touring the Planets, one by one. Doesn't it fire your imagination? Most of the stuff you've sent is drab, lifeless, uninspired. Our rewrite men have had to work like robots to hypo it up. Turn on the rockets, Rick!

And keep the expenses down. Not so many after-dinner Venusian cigars at a dollar per. I ask you who is Orby and you prate on for a paragraph—at five cents a word. You could have sent that by radio-cable, for one cent a word. If he's some drinking companion or broken-down wandering poet, cut him out before he ruins you. Best wishes.

Brown

MAY twenty-fourth, Noon.

Dear Chief:

Thanks for the lecture—at five cents a word.

Listen, Chief, you've got some great stuff coming to you by radio-cable. Dr. Ronson Halbert is superintendent of the experimental mine up the country. And he is installing—guess what? This'll make your sour-puss curdle for sure. Atomic-power drills and machinery! The very thing he was exiled from Earth for, ten years ago!

But the Mercurians are apparently willing to let him try it out. I knew I had to get to that mine and see what was going on. But what trouble it was, Chief, you'll never know. They sneered, so help me, when I said I represented *Multiplaneteer*. I hinted price, and I was ignored. I threatened subtly. *Multiplaneteer*, the System's foremost news agency, most powerful molder of interplanetary opinion, could easily get them in all kinds of Dutch. And they grinned. I was stumped, Chief.

So how did I get to that mine? Orby pulled strings. Orby is connected with Hollywood's Behemoth Studios and threatened to stop every animated cartoon coming to Mercury's theaters. That did it, pronto. Is it a sad fact that what appeals to the senses, rather than to the intellect, rules civilization?

At any rate, there we were at the experimental mine. Dr. Ronson Halbert graciously conducted us around. I like that man. He didn't reveal much, naturally. But there's some whopping big machinery down there that looks as if it can drill to Mars and back. When the setup is completed, Halbert says it will increase the production rate at least ten times. Seems to be confident it'll work this time.

I don't have to tell you what the success of this would mean. At last atomic power could be controlled for heavy-duty work. Play it up big, because it'll be a big—pardon me—colossal achievement. Better than steam-power, electricity, rocket turbines.

Dig up all the data you can about atomic power and hypo it into my report. How a handful of sand could run a rocket ship to Hermes and back. You could drag asteroids around with it. Enough energy in a mass the size of our Moon to squash our entire Universe into a hat, says Halbert.

And it's cheap! The overhead of the System, in all industries, will drop so low that you couldn't fish it up with a mile-long comptometer. The cost of installing this unit here, Halbert admitted, is five billion dollars. But it will pay for itself in a year of operation. Five billion! The Mercurians sure have gone the limit with him. And he was exiled by Earth. . . .

It'll be a stupendous thing, Chief—if it succeeds. Even if it doesn't, it'll be stupendous, if you know what I mean. The date set for the first try-out is three days from now. What luck I'm here. Or maybe what luck you're where you are!

But as I say, Dr. Halbert is confident. He has it controlled this time, he says. I certainly hope he's right.

Well, Chief, does this item meet with your approval? Don't be so vindictive in your pep-talks. After all, I'm a sensitive soul, a poet by nature, and you hurt me with your rude blasts—at five cents a word. I'm doing everything I can, and in all due modesty, when Wyrick dishes it up, it's dished! Why didn't you send Anderson on this tour? Because you know darned well I can write rings around him and find the stuff to write.

As for my occasional nips for medicinal purposes, you don't want an invalid on the job, do you? Poetry, lastly, is my relaxation. Ah, 'tis the gift of the Infinite to striving man! Without it, I would be a barren shell. Orby says my poetry isn't bad. All this is just to bolster up my ego, after you tore it down—at five cents a word. Love and kisses.

Rick

MAY twenty-fourth, Midnight.

Dear Rick:

I don't know if that atomic power item is any good at all. Halbert is an exile, a discredited scientist all over Earth and the System. Don't know why the Mercurians are so dumb as to back him. He's been a down-at-hell wanderer and self-styled prophet about the future of atomic power most of his exile. Five billion dollars worth of junk—that's what you've described in your report. It won't give a squeak, or it'll blow up half of Mercury, including you. I certainly would miss Mercury.

Must you dig up off-trail stuff like that? I want human interest, life, romance! We'll use part of it, however, playing it up from the angle of Earth's superiority. How her second-rate scientists go to other planets and loom there as geniuses. But please give me some reason to think I'm not an unmitigated fool for sending you on this assignment. Please!

And, blast you, Rick, stop mocking me, five cents or no five cents. You, sensitive? You're so thick-skinned, you have to be insulted to get your attention for five minutes. Aside from drink and poetry you used to be a pretty good newsman, so I have to keep you in line this way, even at five cents a word. This Orby is probably a bad influence for you. Hollywood, eh? I can sense from here that he's a dissolute. Ain't human if he likes your poetry.

Now what do you say, Rick? Won't you really get going like a good little boy?

Brown

May twenty-fifth, Noon.

Dear Chief:

Your eloquence moves me. On the way to the Dark-side Observatory, I

wept like a woman. But they were tears of cold, Chief. It's really a dangerous trip. One slight rip in your sealed-suit and you freeze to death in one minute. It doesn't take more than three hours to get there. But in that time the monstrous cold seeps past your warming-coils. Surface temperature, minus 120, for the past billion-odd years on this eternal night-side of Mercury.

Farther out, past the Twilight Territory, where the Hot Winds can't penetrate, it drops close to the Absolute Zero. No one has ever gone out more than a hundred miles on foot.

I arrived at the Observatory feeling like an animated ice-cube. But it's worth the experience. They have it heated, of course, by an underground pipe-line that imports hot air from the day-side. Clever, these Mercurians, though I think Earth engineers made the plans. Anyway, there it is, a huge three-hundred-inch reflector telescope.

Excellent visual conditions, and uninterrupted. Here's where Jimson spotted the tenth planet, Hermes, eighty years ago, before space ships could go out that far. The Mercurian staff astronomers take endless photographs. They can't trust their eyesight. It's naturally weak because of the strong sunlight they were born in. One of their achievements has been to record a dozen comets near Saturn. Those comet tails were so tenuous that they couldn't be seen from Saturn itself!

It's not as dark out here, though, as you would expect. From here, at this opposition, Venus has a disc that's almost as bright as the full Moon on Earth. There's a stock story they tell about O'Rourke, the first Earthman to trek into the night-side, more than a century ago. He saw Venus. On his return to Earth, he swore that Mercury had a moon. He was just a guy who happened to be an explorer and not much of an astronomer, so he didn't know any better. It really fools you, though.

In fact it fooled, or inspired, a young couple in our party to the point of amorous cooings off in a dark corner, cold or no cold. Accidentally coming

upon them—accidentally, I say—they were rattled enough to admit they were honeymooners, as though I didn't know. But the payoff, Chief, is that the girl is Boston socialite Fanchon Ridgeward! And her mysterious elopement partner is or was her family's private rocket ship chauffeur—Andy Jones! Front-page scoop for you, Chief, no extra charge.

That pseudo-moon inspired me, too. I wrote some snappy lines as an ode to the stars. "Yon diamonds in the hair of Night—" But why go on? I can hear your snort all the way here, in advance. But as I said, Orby considers me a first-rank poet in the making.

They served some hot soup before our party went back. For once I positively enjoyed the concoction. Talk about atomic power, Chief. This soup has an *atomic* power whose slightest whiff would send a crawling cheese to Mars in shame. But I'm beginning to like the brew, God forbid.

Speaking of atomic power, there was one other thing Halbert mentioned when I saw him yesterday. He could heat night-side territory with the by-product energy from his process. Hope you're collecting all the data you can get on the science angle. The story will break in two days.

Listen, Chief, don't criticize my friends the way you're running down Orby. And watch out. Orby says I'm just the type for the movies, the strong, silent hero. So maybe with a little pull, which has already been offered, I can get into Behemoth Studios on my return. *Multiplaneteer* will be deprived of its most brilliant star. Put that in your rockets and fire it. But you know I wouldn't let you down, Chief. All my love. Rick

MAY twenty-fifth, Midnight.

Dear Rick:

Can't you hear me groaning? That last mess of wordage by radio-cable, about Dark-side Observatory, was absolutely rank. I know it's one of two things. Either you were in what you quaintly call a poetic mood, or you were plain sotted to the gills. Anderson will be getting some rare brain disease, hypoing rewrite so we can

use some of it. But I'll have to give you another chance, I suppose, out of sheer pity.

And your debutante scoop— The news broke two hours before your report came in, making it prehistoric. Now why in Pluto's pants didn't you get it sooner? If an elephant stepped on you, you'd report a week later that the circus was in town. You're fired, Rick.

On second thought, you're hired again since your hotel bill is paid in advance. But at least I had the satisfaction for a moment.

So you're getting in with Behemoth, through that no-good Orby? All right, sign a contract and I'll radio your fare. I'm so blistering mad right now that I'd pay your fare to Hades. You and that soup . . .

And lay off Halbert. That's an order!

Brown

MAY twenty-sixth, Noon.

Dear Chief:

I had to try some of the local big-game hunting, which is famous throughout the System. Let me tell you, it's big game. And I mean massive!

They take you by mono-rail about a hundred miles along the Twilight Territory, where there's something that's supposed to be a forest. The trees are pulpy things in the small gravity and grow high enough to scrape Venus. When the Cold Winds blow, they bend in that direction and wrap their leaves and branches around themselves like ragged beggars. When the Hot Winds blow, they bend toward that direction, open up, and glow like wildfire. You can almost see it. During a long Hot Wind they'll add a foot an hour.

Naturally the cycle of life is short and merry. New shoots spring up everywhere. Old, tall trees, blown over by the winds, are crashing down every minute. You have to keep your eyes peeled, or you'll end up buried alive. The pulpy, light stuff can't do worse than swat you like a wet rag when it lands. But it can bury you in a ton of sticky messiness in which your friends can never find you. Every now

and then a body is found when the winds have swept up. It's always preserved in jelled sap, like those bugs in amber on Earth.

But this was all incidental. We wanted animal life. We did see some small fry, miniature nightmares on assorted legs, but no big ones. They're kind of rare since Earth's sportsmen, with their expert aim, took to hunting them. Eventually they'll be as extinct as the Earthly rhinoceros.

But Wyrick's luck held. Pretty soon a young mountain moves up ahead. It is the *Risgrawk*—try to pronounce it—fifty feet high and twice as ugly looking. When it spies us, or detects us with its long antennae, it begins growling. The guide stops us three hundred yards away. Good thing, because that critter suddenly lets loose with all it has. From a shiny, moist knob on its head it shoots—you can't guess, Chief—electricity! Long sparks of it, estimated at 100,000 volts!

When that thing bore down on us like a runaway express rocket, we all got paralyzed except the guide. He let go with his blunderbus and then we all remembered we still had trigger fingers. The *Risgrawk* proved allergic to bullets. It finally settled down like a grounded zeppelin. The guide kept us from going closer for ten minutes. We saw why.

That knob suddenly exploded. Enough loose electricity was thrown around to electrocute an army. When that happened, it was dead. The skin is going to be mounted as a trophy in Kranto's hunting lodge. We all get credit for it.

The way it collects its electricity is one of Nature's cutest scientific plagiarisms. The *Risgrawk* runs to the night-side, stores cold somewhere inside. Then it runs to the day-side and stores heat. In between its cold-sac and warm-sac is what corresponds to a thermo-generator, manufacturing electricity out of the drop in temperature. Clever, these *Risgrawks*. With a cold shoulder and a hot foot they sure make the sparks fly.

Orby, watching me kneel and shoot, says I'd be a natural for a brave-man-in-jungle picture. Suggests I'd be

good in a revival of Tarzan, a noble character of the twentieth century. Watch my rockets flare when I hit Hollywood!

Dr. Ronson Halbert was in town today, looking as excited as a collision. Don't tell me to lay off him, Chief, because he's going to be news. Day after tomorrow is the tryout of his atom smashers. I'll be around till then—longer I hope. Wish me luck!

I guess this big-game writeup will convince you that I'm the triple-A newsmen I really am. Don't try to deny it.

Rick

May twenty-sixth, Midnight.

Dear Rick:

I think you're a good poet.

Brown

MAY twenty-seventh, Noon.

Dear Chief:

Let's lay down our guns. Listen to this. This morning there's a knock on my door. Who walks in but Dr. Ronson Halbert. He said he wanted to hear the news about Earth and figured I ought to know it all, being a newspaper man.

Well, there he sat, Chief, with the most homesick look on his pan while I talked. Every time I said "Earth," he jumped as if I had stuck a pin in him. You can say anything you like, but exile is a horrible thing.

I could see that man eating his heart out to go back, to breathe that wonderful, soil-tainted air. He wanted to walk in the gravitation he was born to. I knew he longed to see faces around him like his own, instead of the gargoyle varieties Nature has produced on other worlds. He is living in torture, Chief. I wouldn't wish his fate on my worst enemy.

Before long he was weeping like a baby, and I had to give him a couple of shots of Mercurian vodka to straighten him out. Then he talked and I had to be straightened out in a like manner. It was a funeral dirge, the bitterness of life on other worlds, among alien beings and trying environments. But most of all was the hurt of the banishment.

Then he told me all about the big

explosion that blew him off the Earth. He had got on the track of atomic power, there in his Fort Wayne workshop. He got it in little spurts, with tiny amounts of activated fuel. He hoped to develop the process to where it could be used industrially. Then came the disaster—an explosion that killed 25,000 people, dug a hole a half-mile deep. He estimates that a whole pound of matter had gone off at once.

Then he got to crying again when he continued talking. Chief, do you know the whole thing was not his fault at all, and not deliberate? He is positive it resulted through the carelessness of his assistant. He had taken the most elaborate precautions against danger. But he can't prove his point, because the assistant was blown up. The very fact that Halbert himself had been leaving in his car, and was miles away at the time, made it look bad for him.

You know the rest, Chief. Court trial, insinuations that he aimed at rule of Earth and all that rot, sentence to exile for the rest of his natural days—for the murder of 25,000 people. Murder? Chief, this guy wouldn't step on a lowly skunk, human or otherwise. He's a humanitarian, or I'm not Aston Wyrick, the best newsman this side of Orion. So you can imagine how the sentence has corroded his soul during all these years.

But he didn't give up, or get bitter. He still wants to give civilization the gift of atomic power. The Mercurians finally sponsored him, three years ago. He's worked on it ever since, harder than a slave. His success in his mine will mean atomic power for the entire System. And he says that if it works, he'll send the plans to Earth—*anonymous!*

Chief, you're too commercial to appreciate this sort of thing. But I'm a poet down underneath, so to me it's the real thing. You take that writeup I'm sending you by radio-cable and print it word for word. Don't let any of your rewriters touch it or, so help me, I'll tear the office apart when I get back.

We've got to take up Halbert's case, Chief. We must smear the truth about

him all over the System. We can prepare the ground for him so that, when and if his atomic power works, he'll get the full pardon he deserves. Tomorrow is the tryout, and it'll be a great thing for *Multiplaneteer*, too. All set, Chief? Answer immediately.

Rick

MAY twenty-seventh, three ten P. M.

Dear Rick:

You crazy crusader! Dr. Halbert's case is taboo, closed. It's packed dynamite. The Congress of Scientists would blackball *Multiplaneteer* for the next two ages if we opened up your way. Lay off, dimwit. Is it the soup, vodka, or Orby? Brown

May twenty-seventh, six-nine P.M.

Dear Chief:

Since when has anything but the great arbiter, Public Opinion, ruled about the humanities? With the success of Halbert's atomic power, my story will start a riot from here to Hermes if the Brainies in Congress don't give him the Distinguished Cross of Space!

You want human interest. Here it is, you primordial dope! Rick

May twenty-seventh, Midnight.

Dear Rick:

Who are you calling primordial? You're fired, utterly, completely, ultimately, eternally! Anderson is taking the next liner for Venus, to continue your Tour where you got left off. Back to your poems and pudding post. Good-by and good riddance.

Brown

May twenty-eighth, Noon.

Dear Mr. Brown:

Okay. I ought to send you a radio-cable, telling what I think of you—at one cent a word. You wouldn't rate five.

Aston Wyrick, Esq.

May thirtieth, noon.

Dear Mr. Brown:

I'm no longer in your employ, so this is off the record.

Dr. Halbert's machines worked! They worked like a million bucks,

purring like a well fed cat. At the cost of five dollars—which includes fuel, depreciation of machinery and all—he dug out a thousand dollars worth of platinum in one hour. That, Mr. Brown, is history!

Of course that's all it is, just history. It won't mean that the System's industry will treble itself overnight, raising the standard of living for everyone, mostly you and maybe me. It won't mean the dawn of a greater civilization. That's only for poets like me to rave about. You know better. And you know, too, that the man who did it is a scoundrel, a murderer, a beast who wantonly wiped out half a town just for the fun of it.

You should have seen the look on his face, Brown. You'd think he was looking straight into some heaven—and also into some hell.

But why should I bother to go on? It's the vodka in me. Believe it or not, I'm going on a permanent jag and stay on it, so I won't get sober and realize what tiny piddlers you and I and all the rest of us are compared with that

man. Even Orby can't stop me. —Aston Wyrick, Poet

May thirtieth, Midnight.

Dear Rick:

All is forgiven! I took a chance with your story and it went over with a bang. Went to press three hours ago and already about five million radiograms and cables have come in, cheering for Dr. Halbert, demanding his pardon. What a great day for *Multiplaneteer!* And also for you, Rick. Your story did it. It really wasn't a bad writeup, when you examine it closely—and reverently.

Incidentally you're reinstated with *Multiplaneteer*, at double salary. Little fit of anger I had. Trivial thing. I know you didn't really intend to hit the bottles, anyhow. —Brown

MAY thirty-first, Noon.

Dear Brown:

Sorry. Can't postpone that bun. Besides, I have some poetry to write. Besides that, Orby has other plans.

Rick

(Concluded on page 129)

THOUSANDS OF WHISKEY DRINKERS ARE NOW SAYING:



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THE WORLDS OF TOMORROW

URANUS, THE MOUNTAIN WORLD

URANUS, the seventh planet from the Sun, is known throughout the System as the Mountain World. Just as Venus is most renowned for its great swamps, and Mars for its deserts, and Pluto for its ice-fields, so the titanic mountains of Uranus are its best-known natural feature.

There are no mountains elsewhere in the Solar System like them. The ranges of old Earth, or the low hills of Jupiter or icy mountains of Pluto are mere mole-hills compared to the mighty Uranian peaks. Even the smaller ranges soar to heights of five and ten miles. Many of the great peaks are very much higher. And there is one colossal range in the northern hemisphere, called the Mystery Mountains, which have an altitude of at least twenty miles and possibly much more.

The Mystery Mountains' eternally cloud-wrapped upper heights have never been explored. It is believed that strange creatures inhabit those lofty hidden heights, since occasionally men have found grotesque bodies floating down the North River that flows from those mountains toward the Polar Sea.

The People of Darkness

These stupendous mountain ranges intersect the whole surface of Uranus, divided by chasm-like valleys of incredible

depth. Beneath the surface of the planet is a natural wonder almost as great as the mountains, the great caves of Uranus. The interior of the planet is honeycombed by a labyrinth of caverns unmatched anywhere else in the System.

Men have explored some of the upper caverns. There is a tiny amount of light in them, emitted from the radioactive minerals in which Uranus is rich. And there is a whole range of life-forms that exist in the caverns and never emerge into the sunlight. These beasts and birds, and also the fish and water creatures that dwell in the underground rivers and sunless seas, have developed eyes capable of seeing clearly in the dim radioactive glow.

Also, there are humans of a primitive kind who dwell in the caves and are known as the People of Darkness. They are presumed to be descendants of Uranian stock who ages ago went down into the caves and developed eyesight capable of seeing well there. These People of Darkness never appear on the surface. Intense light dazes them.

Uranus, like most of the outer planets, is kept warm in spite of its great distance from the Sun by the heat of the radioactive matter in its core. This radioactive matter is responsible also for another of the wonders of the seventh planet—the Shining Seat in the southern hemisphere.

It is a sea whose waters are so impregnated with radioactive material from deposits in its bed that it glows at night like a great lake of light. The Uranian city of Lulanee is built on the shores of the Shining Sea, and is considered by interplanetary travelers to possess one of the most beautiful settings of any city in the System.

The Endless River

Another remarkable natural feature of Uranus is the Endless River. This is a torrential stream which flows around the whole planet near the equator. Its waters are kept flowing in an endless course, tugged by the tidal pull of the four moons of the planet. Evaporation of the Endless River is just matched by the inflow of smaller streams, and its perpetual rushing flow from west to east never ceases. It has eroded for itself a deep canyon all around the planet. At one point, a mass of silver-bearing rock which resisted the erosion forms a natural bridge across the canyon and river. Near this natural span, which is called Silver Bridge, is situated

~ URANUS ~ WESTERN HEMISPHERE

DISTANCE FROM SUN
1,782,000,000 MILES

DIAMETER- 31,875 MILES

LENGTH OF YEAR
84 EARTH YEARS

LENGTH OF DAY
10.7 EARTH HOURS

VOLUME - 64 TIMES
THAT OF EARTH

THE MOONS OF URANUS

ARIEL ... 600 MILES DIAMETER

UMBRIEL 500 " "

TITANIA 1200 " "

OBERON 1000 " "

the Uranian city of Losor.

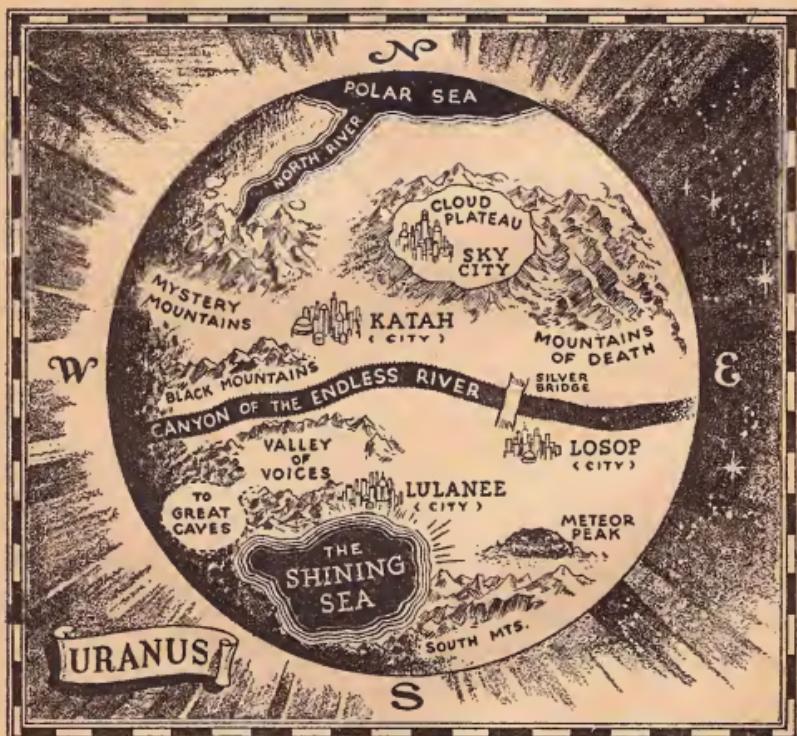
In the wilds south of Losor is the remarkable mountain called Meteor Peak. It is not a natural mountain like the other peaks of Uranus, but is in fact a huge meteor which fell there in times past and half-buried itself in the ground. Because of its unique metallic nature the meteor did not shatter, and still rises from the wilds as a great, dome-like mass of metal. It has sometimes been used as a quarry for certain metals, but that has now been prohibited.

The Valley of Voices

In the southern hemisphere is the Valley of Voices. This is one of the curiosities of the System. It is a vast chasm in which

On the high tableland in the north which is called Cloud Plateau, is located the loftiest Uranian city. It is Sky City, and is well named because of its extreme altitude. It is of more recent origin than Lulanee and Losor and the other Uranian cities, since it was not until the invention of rocket-aircraft that a city upon this lofty highland became feasible.

The ordinary interplanetary traveler who visits Uranus is always a little bewildered by its moons. Their orbits are the strangest of any satellites in the whole System, for instead of revolving around the planet in the plane of the ecliptic, their orbits are almost at right angles to that plane. To complicate matters, the plane of Uranus' own rotation is at a sharp angle



echoes literally go on forever. The echo of any sound, in any other place, rapidly dies away as the sound vibrations lose power. But in the Valley of Voices, sheets of a talc-like material exuded from the cliffs seem to have the power of recording in some way any sound vibrations which fall upon them.

These queer talc-sheets, whenever the wind strikes them, give forth all the sounds they have "recorded." The result is that in the Valley of Voices one can still clearly hear sounds and human voices which are echoing after thousands of years.

to the ecliptic plane. To make things still stranger, both the rotation of Uranus and the revolution of its moons are from west to east instead of from east to west.

The result is that on Uranus, the sun rises in the west and sets in the east, and that it is always far in the north or in the south, but never directly overhead. You will see the sun go down in the far north, and then see the moons come up in the west and turtle across the sky toward the eastern horizon. The whole process is confusing to strangers from other worlds, though the Uranians claim that other worlds are as confusing to them.

Uranian Civilization

The Uranians are one of the most individual peoples in the System. Physically, they are much like other planetary peoples, which is not strange now that it is known that all worlds' peoples came originally of a common stock. The Uranians have yellow skins, dark hair, and small, dark eyes. They possessed considerable civilization long before Earthmen came pioneering to their world, though there is no evidence that the ancient Uranians ever experimented with space travel as the ancient Martians and Jovians did.

The Uranians are for the most part a hardy race, as would be expected from a people inhabiting such a mountainous world. But they are perhaps the most conservative and tradition-ridden people in all the nine worlds. They revere custom, and practice a suave courtesy that most people find rather wearying. They are staunch friends, but have none of the high-tempered élan of Mercurians, or indolent good nature of Venusians, or cocky friendliness of Earthmen.

They are not especially distinguished in architecture or the arts, but they are perhaps the most skilled miners in the System, due to their long acquaintance with the underground labyrinth of their world. Wherever you go in the System to mining projects, you will find a few Uranian technicians.

Flora and Fauna

The flora of Uranus is not remarkable, since the planet lacks any very great forests. Most of its trees are stunted ones

clinging to their mountain-cliffs. There are lush jungles in some of the deeper valleys, however. Perhaps the most distinctive plant-life of Uranus are its Floating Flowers—flowers that drift in the air by means of sacs into which pure hydrogen is exuded, and whose trailing air-roots supply them with water and nutrition from the air.

The animal life of Uranus is abundant, and comprises many of the most ferocious carnivores in the System. The so-called "cliff-apes" are the most dreaded, being not really apes but huge bear-like animals whose six limbs are adapted for climbing over the sheer precipices. The "cloud-cats" are almost as dangerous, being large felines who haunt the cloud-wrapped upper heights of the peaks, and stalk their prey in the eternal mists.

More famous than any ground animals are the great birds of prey of Uranus. No birds in the System attain such incredible size as these monsters. The "thunder-hawk" has vast wings which can shadow a whole village and can carry off huge beasts in its claws. The "harpies" that are so named because of the remarkable human-like appearance of their winged bodies are really only voracious birds of prey. Their human-like appearance is mere accident, and they are in no way as intelligent as the Qualus, the famous winged men of north Saturn.

There are many other species of beasts and birds in the great caverns. But little is known of their natures, since exploration of those sunless depths is always dangerous, and the man who dares to enter them is at a terrible disadvantage in their dark recesses against his attackers.

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MARTIAN MENU

By CHARLES STODDARD

Author of "Thunder Jim Wade," "The Hills of Gold," etc.

Mars Sees Waterloo Change to Victory in Lancelot Wellington's Battle of the Bill of Fares!

LANCELOT WELLINGTON knew it was too good to last. When he saw the rocket car land on the island and begin unloading prefabricated sections of a building, he watched rather interestedly. But then a vast sign was carefully hauled out and laid on the red sand. Acutely startled, he almost ripped his lip as he snatched the cigarette out of his mouth and hurled it into the canal.

"What a crust!" he snarled, stamping furiously into the kitchen of his restaurant.

"No crust—flapjacks," replied the Martian cook, flipping four simultaneously with half his arms while stirring batter, greasing the grill and scratching his furry nose with the others. "Earth people like them well done."

"Some dirty crook is moving in on us," Wellington stated. "Building another restaurant on this island. That isn't bad enough, though. He bought himself a sign that's twice as big as mine!"

"Poetry," remarked the cook admiringly. "We go out of business, Boss?"

"If I do, he goes out with us!" shouted Wellington. His face lost its stern resolve, grew pleading and unhappy. "I don't know how we'll buck up against him, if he's got any money. It took every cent I had to buy my lot on the island. It's the only stop between Polar City and New New York, so the land comes high. Chrysanthemum, I must have been born with a private eight-ball all my own. The one good idea I ever had in my life—

putting up a restaurant in the canal, right where people with money really get hungry—someone has to steal from me!"

"We go out of business," said the cook philosophically, "you come to North Desert with me. We live in mudholes at my family's oasis and eat snakes. I cook them so good, you think they are Venusian water bats."

"Thanks," Wellington replied, swallowing painfully.

A skitterboat flitted up to the dock and two Earth couples, seven Martian officials and a crew of four stepped out. Naturally the Terrestrials wanted to sample toasted sandbirds' tongues and braised dalobar antennae, whereas the Martians insisted on their usual frankfurters with jelly, underdone flapjacks and ketchup.

up, followed by hot coffee with floating balls of pure rum ice cream. Before Chrysanthemum could whip up all those dishes with his astonishing arms, another skitterboat and a tourist rocket car dropped in.

Wellington stood at the cash counter, taking money and worriedly supervising the eternally abstracted Martian waiters. They were wonders at carrying eight trays all at the same time. But lack of interest in current events made them do equal wonders in nauseating Terrestrials by putting before them the Martian conception of a nice home-cooked Earth meal. Between calling them back to the present and arguing with Martians who could not understand the immorality of leav-



ing a ten-dollar tip while trying to pay a quarter for a dollar and a half meal, he managed to watch developments outside.

The competing restaurant was being put up with the speed of a new light-drive space ship. Apparently the owner preferred swiftness to cutting costs, for he was using human laborers instead of the much cheaper, but less interested Martians. The foundation had been fused already with a heat-ray that melted the sand, drove it back in liquid form and held it there until it hardened into walls. As soon as the foundation cooled, men went down into it and smoothed and squared the rough spots with hand-guns. While they were working below, others were raising the walls and fusing them together so solidly that not even a polar hurricane could destroy them.

"I asked you if you aren't glad to have company on your lonely island!" a soprano voice said insistently. "How can you do business, if you don't keep your mind on it?"

WELLINGTON pulled his bitter gaze from the harrowing scene outside. He didn't actually swallow his cigarette, but he strangled on the smoke.

"Yes, it's Betty," the girl said. "You always did do peculiar things with cigarettes, like burning yourself, or leaving them where they could do the most damage, or choking on them. Why don't you just stop trying to smoke?"

"I—I like—like it," he gasped, waving frantically at a waiter.

"As a matter of fact," she continued with a surgically analytical detachment, "why don't you go away and leave the Solar System alone? It would be much better off without you. So would you, for that matter."

He snatched the glass of water out of a waiter's hand. Drinking with heroic, anxious gulps, he looked at the girl over the rim of the glass. He knew she was lovely, but that confession couldn't have been wrung from him without torture.

"You bought the lot next to mine, didn't you?" he asked coldly, as soon as he could speak.

"I did," she replied frigidly. "And I'm opening a bigger, better restaurant than yours, which I hope will drive yours to the wall."

"Why?" he demanded icily. "Out of a whole Solar System, you certainly had plenty of room to choose from. You didn't exactly have to settle down on a hunk of land that's less than an acre, just to be mean and contemptible."

"On the other hand," she answered frostily, "you didn't have to hog both lots. Wasn't one enough for you?"

He looked at her puzzledly, until he remembered to maintain his frozen expression.

"I don't get it," he said.

"My men can't continue working. You'll have to do something about the fact that thirty-seven millimeters of your building are right on my property. That's a legal violation, you know—trespassing."

He turned and stared through the lucite window.

"M-my b-building overlaps your property h-how many millimeters?" he stammered.

"Thirty-seven. At current Canal Island real estate prices, plus damages such as delay in construction, labor charges and loss of business, it amounts to—How much was that, Mr. Slaughter?"

Wellington turned dazedly to the little Earthman who had stepped forward, rubbing his hands together and smiling unpleasantly.

"A hundred and four thousand, nine hundred and sixteen dollars and seventy-eight cents. The precedent has been so well established, Mr. Wellington, that the court at Polar City would grant us a decision within a day. Naturally we'd prefer a settlement out of court, since you would also have to pay charges if we fought."

"But I haven't got that much money," Wellington protested wildly.

"How much do you have?" Betty asked.

HE smiled weakly. "About three thousand. Isn't there anything we can do, besides driving each other out of business? After all, we were almost married."

"We're not driving each other out of business," she retorted. "I'm doing all the driving. I'd rather ignore the fact that I once thought you were more than a worm. But you do deserve a slight amount of consideration, I suppose. Instead of giving back your ring when I broke the engagement, I sold it and took a series of fliers in business. It wasn't a very good ring, you know."

He flushed. "At least it was paid for."

Wellington swabbed the sweat off his brow and took what he considered a last look at his possessions.

"What's this consideration you're giving me?" he asked cautiously.

"Move your building off my land by tonight. If you'll pay twenty-five hundred dollars for overtime and loss of trade, I'll give you a release."

"But how can I move my building?" cried Wellington. "You can't just move these things! You have to tear them down and rebuild. . . ."

"That," said Betty loftily, "is your own affair."

She went out. Attacking his problem frantically from all sides, without managing to outflank it, Wellington burned himself twice and undercharged more customers than he overcharged. He finally had to give the cash register to a waiter, while he wandered hopelessly into the kitchen.

Wellington told Chrysanthemum the situation. Several orders of flapjacks went up in smoke and Chrysanthemum absent-mindedly ruined a few frankfurters by putting on mustard instead of jelly. When he finally came out of his dreamy stupor, however, he clicked off the answer like an integrator.

Lancelot Wellington was a new man when he made a radio-phone call to New New York. Then he strode to the window and grinned slyly at Betty and Mr. Slaughter.

THE rocket car landed within two hours and three men went to work with heat beams. The entire job took another three and a half hours. When it was finished, the wall of his restaurant that had trespassed on Betty's property no longer did so. They had

sheered it until it was paper-thin.

"Now, Miss Jamison," said Wellington to the dismayed girl, "you may go ahead and build your pretty little head off. I hope you manage to."

Bluntly turning her back on him, she dismissed her lawyer and almost snapped orders at the workmen. Before the Sun dropped abruptly below the horizon, the enormous sign was blinking:

BETTY'S GREAT DIPPER
Name Your Favorite Delicacy
We Have It!

"Why the Titanian devil did I have to call my place the Little Dipper?" Wellington grumbled. "Just as I thought, she squeezed her building right up against mine. There isn't a millimeter to spare between them. It makes this place look like a trailer. I'm going right in there and—"

"Not yet," advised Chrysanthemum. "You like Terrestrial female?"

"Yeah," Wellington admitted wryly. "She just happened to be too smart for me."

Chrysanthemum mechanically tied four pretzels at once and put them on a tray. His mind wasn't on his work, though.

"Miss Betty no dopy," the cook declared. "She build grub shop against ours for good reason. People think you expand, maybe. They like your food, they trust hers."

"That delicacies from all over the System business gets me sore," Wellington said disgruntledly. "She knows I don't have the money to compete."

"But customers don't know," replied Chrysanthemum. "I cook everything so it taste like something else. That make me good cook, huh, Boss?"

"The best," Wellington said distractedly. "I'm going to tell her—"

"Wait till she starts something. We see what she does first."

Wellington took the shrewd Martian's advice. That night, the dinner crowd seemed bigger than ever, but the Little Dipper could not offer such rarities as Plutonian fish, petrified clabba eggs, mingel livers from Mercury. Betty's restaurant took most of the trade.

The next day Wellington spent all morning printing cards to match his competitor's. She added disintegrated sweetbreads from Ionian elephant-snails, Chop Suey and champagne vinegar—which set the Martians on their heels with gastronomic delight—and things that Wellington and his cook had never heard of.

But Chrysanthemum analyzed the situation with typical Martian intelligence. He had Wellington buy orders of these spectacular dishes from the Big Dipper and concocted passable duplicates from the most unlikely materials. That was not enough for his logical mind, however.

"Tourists go where Martians advise," Chrysanthemum stated to the distraught Wellington. "Give Martians what they like, they take tourists there. You sit in corner and write down everything you like when you little boy."

After several hours, Wellington produced a long list that started with licorice sticks and ended with half-raw roasted potatoes. By judiciously ordering and mixing everything that refused to go together, Chrysanthemum produced a bill of fare that made Betty's menu and Wellington's face look sick. The result was apparent the next evening. The trade came over to the Little Dipper.

BETTY, however, had hired a genius who was at least the match of Chrysanthemum. Since little girls like more peculiar foods than little boys, and she had been quick to understand Chrysanthemum's strategy, she produced a menu even more tasty to Martians. It was so alluring that Chrysanthemum actually went there for dinner and returned with the peculiar blind look that denotes complete Martian pleasure.

"Now that's my idea of loyalty!" Wellington stormed. "She isn't taking enough trade from us. You have to give her more!"

"Very good food," Chrysanthemum said dreamily. "Sardines and marshmallow, pickles stuffed with dates and nuts, oysters swimming in honey...."

Wellington gulped. "That's enough. I'm going in there right now."

"Not yet," said Chrysanthemum sleepily. "Terrestrial female has beautiful soul, or she couldn't cook so beautiful. You take her out to look at Deimos and make love-talk."

For the first time since Chrysanthemum had given him the answer to his problem, Wellington's features lit up.

"That isn't a bad idea," he mused, going to the door. "Not bad at all."

He was less eager when he had to push his way through the crowd waiting for tables in Betty's restaurant. Somehow he managed to lure her outside, by saying he wanted to discuss some urgent matters. Deimos glowed softly on the dark desert and turned the placid canal into a silver mirror.

"Remember our first evening together?" he whispered. "We were in Central Park, watching the canoes glide through the new river—"

"Because you had a job that matched your mentality," she retorted, "and couldn't afford to rent a canoe."

"I thought you were the loveliest girl I had ever seen," he breathed more desperately, trying to ignore the sour note she had introduced. "From the first minute I saw you, I swore you'd be mine."

"I knew better," she said in a conversational tone, which sounded like a siren to him. "You couldn't buy a shine, so you were rubbing your shoes on your legs. But I had the silly idea that something could be made of you. That was my big mistake. You just admitted yours."

"You have made something of me!" he shouted. "You turned my love to hatred, my heart to ice. I'll break you, make you come crawling to me!"

He strode away like an enraged robot. Chrysanthemum jumped when he slammed the kitchen door, dragged a chair to the table and began printing signs.

"Earth people funny," the cook announced, testing a cake, flipping flapjacks and salting a stew. "Martians have better way than falling in love. Martian papa holds raffle. Girl wins boy—no trouble, no fights, nothing. Get married and try to forget each other."

Wellington went on printing signs.

When he was finished, the cook gasped as he stared at them.

"You on our side, or hers?" demanded Chrysanthemum. "Why you try to drive us out of business?"

"I'm driving her out," Wellington gritted. "She can't buck these prices."

"Neither can we," added the cook, shaking his head mournfully.

HE was right, but not in the way Wellington imagined. When the signs were up and the dinner crowd began arriving, he stood outside and waited for them to come in.

"I wouldn't go in there," said a bejeweled Jovian woman distastefully. "Why, those prices are one-tenth as much as the Big Dipper's."

"Can't be any good," agreed her husband.

They went into the Big Dipper, and so did everyone else. Wellington noticed too late that Betty had deliberately tripled her prices, making his seem impossibly little.

His chest heaved. It was time to play his trump card. He fought his way into the Big Dipper, grabbed Betty's wrist and hauled her outside. It was a bit more difficult to get her inside his place, but his mood allowed for no quibbling.

"Now, financial wizard," he snarled, "let's see what you can do with this. When I had my wall sheered away to get it off your property, I didn't stop at thirty-seven millimeters. I had it cut seventy-seven millimeters—forty more than I had to. According to free legal advice from your lawyer, I should be able to collect about a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars in court. Naturally I'd prefer to set-

tle it privately."

"B-but I'm not on y-your property," she stammered.

"You certainly are. You built your restaurant flush against mine, which means your wall is forty millimeters over on my lot. Now how do I collect —sue, or settle out of court? Don't forget the costs, genius."

"I don't have that much!" she wailed. "I spent ninety thousand for the lot, building and labor. All I have left is six thousand. You tricked me!"

Chrysanthemum was mopping the floor, wiping the meat-board and sharpening a knife. He paused to observe:

"Love and business make funny business. You love each other, so you talk like enemies. And you ruin each other so you can say other one is a dopy and don't deserve love. Martian marriage lottery much smarter."

Stricken silent, they watched him wash and dry dishes simultaneously. Wellington was the first to come out of the trance.

"Yeah, he's right, all right. Do we have to keep fighting all the time?"

She lifted her head defiantly. "You tried to trick me out of my restaurant!" she accused.

"Cheaper to break down wall," said Chrysanthemum, crossing the kitchen and effortlessly poking his finger through the thin partition between the restaurants. Costs less than moving, breaking down building, or suing."

Suddenly in each other's arms, they couldn't deny his sharp Martian logic. Betty didn't even mind when he dropped ashes on her shoulder.

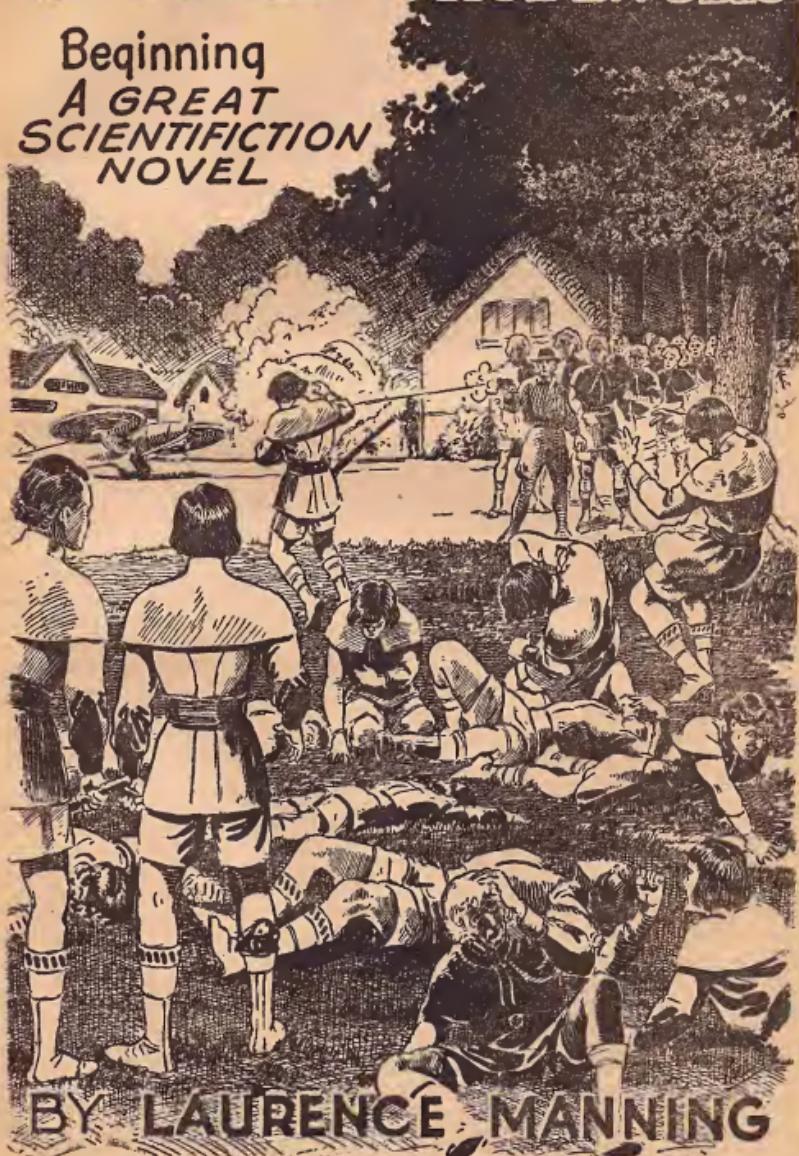
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bureau that his son employed gave the vanished man any further thought.

Snow came early that year in the Westchester suburb where the Winters' estate lay. It covered the ground with a thick blanket of white.

In the hills across the Hudson the bears had hibernated and lay sleeping under their earthen and icy blanket. In the pond on the estate the frogs had vanished from sight and lay hidden in the mud at the bottom, a miracle in suspended animation for biologists to puzzle over. The world went on about its winter business and gave up the vanished banker for lost. The frogs might have given them a clue, or the bears.

Even stranger than these was the real hiding place of Norman Winters. Fifty feet beneath the frozen Earth he lay in a hollow chamber a dozen feet across. He was curled up on soft eiderdown piled five feet deep and his eyes were shut in the darkness of absolute night and utter quiet.

During October his heart beat slowly and gently. His chest, had there been light to see by, might have been observed to rise and fall slightly. By November these signs of life no longer existed in the motionless figure.

The weeks sped by and the snow melted. The bears came hungrily out of winter quarters and set about restoring their wasted tissues. The frogs made the first warm nights of spring melodious to Nature-lovers and hideous to light sleepers.

But Norman Winters did not rise

IT was in all the newspapers for the entire month of September. Reports came in from such out-of-the-way places as Venezuela and Monte Carlo:

MISSING BANKER FOUND

But such reports always proved false. The disappearance of Norman Winters was at last given up as one of those mysteries that can be solved only by the great detectives Time and Chance. His description was broadcast from one end of the civilized world to the other. Five feet eleven inches tall, brown hair, grayish dark eyes, aquiline nose, fair complexion, age forty-six. Hobbies, history and biology. Distinguishing marks, a small mole set at the corner of the right nostril.

His son could spare little time for search. Just a month before his disappearance, Winters had practically retired from active affairs and left their direction to his son's capable hands. There was no clue as to motive, for he had absolutely no enemies and possessed a great deal of money with which to indulge his dilettante scientific hobbies. By October only the highly-paid detective

from his sleep with these vernal harbingers. Deathly still lay his body and the features were waxy white. There was no decay and the flesh was clean and fresh.

No frost penetrated to this great depth, but the chamber was much warmer than this mere statement would indicate. Definite warmth came from a closed box in one corner and had come from it all the winter. From the top of the chamber wall, a heavy leaden pipe came through the wall from the living rock beyond and led down to this closed box. Another similar pipe led out from it and down through the floor. Above the box was a dial. Figures on it read in thousands from one to one hundred and a hand pointed to slightly below the two-thousand mark.

TWO platinum wires ran from the box over to the still figure on its piled couch and ended in golden bands, one around one wrist and the other circling the opposite ankle. By his side stood a cabinet of carved stone, shut and mysterious, like everything in that chamber. But no light was here to see by, only darkness, the black of eternal night, the groping, stifling darkness of the tomb. Here was no cheering life-giving radiation of any kind.

The unchanging leaden metal sealed in the air from which the dust had settled completely, as it never does on the surface of our world, and had left it as pure and motionless as crystal and as lifeless. For without change and motion there can be no life. The faint odor of some disinfectant remained in the atmosphere, as though not even bacteria had been permitted to exist in this place of death.

At the end of a month Vincent Winters, the son of the missing man, made a thorough examination of all the facts and possible clues that the detectives had brought to light, bearing upon his father's disappearance. They amounted to little.

On Friday, September 8th, his father had spent the day on his estate. He had dined alone, read awhile in the library, written a letter or two and retired to his bedroom early. The



The Chief Forester

next morning he had failed to put in an appearance for breakfast. Dibbs, the butler, after investigating, reported that his bed had not been slept in. The servants had, of course, all been minutely questioned, even though their characters were such as almost to preclude suspicion.

Only one, the oldest and most loyal of them all, had acted and spoken in answer to questions in a fashion that aroused the curiosity of Vincent Winters. This man was Carstairs, the gardener, a tall, ungainly Englishman with a long, sad-looking face. He had been in the employ of Norman Winters for twelve years.

On Friday night, about midnight, he had been seen entering his cottage with two shovels over his shoulder. In itself, it was not an incriminating circumstance, but his explanation lacked credibility. He had, he said, been digging in the garden.

"But why two shovels, Carstairs?" asked Vincent for the hundredth time.

He received the same unvarying answer.

"I'd mislaid one shovel earlier in the day and went and got another. Then I found the first as I started home."

Vincent rose to his feet restlessly. "Come," he said, "show me the place you were digging."

Carstairs paled slightly and shook his head.

"What, you refuse?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Vincent. Yes, I must refuse to show you—that."

There were a few moments of silence in the room. Vincent sighed.

"Well, Carstairs, you leave me no choice. You are almost an institution on this place. My boyhood memories of the estate are full of pictures of you, but I shall have to turn you over to the police just the same."

He stared with hardening eyes at the old servant. The man started visibly and opened his mouth, but closed it again with true British obstinacy. Not until Vincent had turned and picked up the telephone did he speak.

"Stop, Mr. Vincent!"

Vincent turned in his chair to look at him, the receiver in his hand.

"I cannot show you the place I was digging. Mr. Winters ordered me not to show it to anyone."

"You surely don't expect me to believe that!" Vincent exclaimed.

"You will still insist?"

"Of course I will."

"Then I have no choice. In case it were absolutely necessary to do so, I was to tell you these words. 'Steubenauer on Metabolism.'"

"What on Earth does that mean?"

"I was not informed, sir."

"You mean my father told you to say that if you were suspected of his—er—of being connected with his disappearance?"

The gardener nodded without speaking.

"Sounds like the name of a book."

Vincent went into the library and consulted the neatly arranged card index. There was the book, right enough, an old, brown leather volume in the biological section. As Vincent opened it wonderingly, an envelope fell out and dropped to the floor. He picked it up, found it addressed to himself in his father's handwriting. With trembling, anxious fingers he opened it and read:

MY Dear Son:
It would be better, perhaps, if you were never to read this, but it is a necessary precaution. The police may in some unforeseen way connect Carstairs with my disappear-

ance. I anticipate this possibility because it is true. He has in actual fact helped me disappear, but at my own orders. He obeyed these orders with tears and expostulation and was to the very end just what he has always been—a good and devoted servant. Please see that he is never in want.

The discovery and investigation of the so-called "cosmic" rays was of the greatest interest to us biologists. Life is a chemical reaction consisting fundamentally in the constant, tireless breaking up of organic molecules and their continual replacement by fresh structures formed from the substance of the food we eat.

Lifeless matter is comparatively changeless. A diamond crystal, for instance, is composed of molecules which do not break up readily. There is no change, no life, going on in it. Organic molecules and cells are termed "unstable," but why they should be so was neither properly understood nor explained until cosmic rays were discovered. Then we suspected the truth. The bombardment of living tissue by these minute high-speed particles caused that constant changing of detail which we term "life."

Can you guess now the nature of my experiment? For three years I worked on my idea. Herkimer of Johns Hopkins helped me with the drug I shall use, and Mortimer of Harvard worked out my ray-screen requirements. But neither one knew what my purpose might be in the investigations.

Radiation cannot penetrate six feet of lead, buried far beneath the ground. During the past year I have constructed, with Carstairs' help, just such a shielded chamber on my estate. Tonight I shall descend into it and Carstairs shall fill in the hole over the tunnel entrance and plant sod over the place so that it can never be found.

Down in my lead-walled room I shall drink my special drug and fall into a coma which would, on the surface of the Earth, last at most a few hours. But down there, shielded from all change, I shall never wake until I am again subjected to radiation. A powerful X-ray tube is con-

nected and set in the wall. Upon the elapse of my allotted time, this will light, operated by the power generated from a subterranean stream I have piped through my chamber.

The X-ray radiation will, I hope, awaken me from my long sleep. I shall arise and climb up through the tunnel to the world above. And I shall see with these two eyes the glory of the world that is to be when mankind has risen on the stepping-stones of science to its great destiny.

Do not try to find me. You will marry and forget me in your new interests. As you know, I have turned over to you my entire wealth. You wondered why at the time. Now you know. By all means marry. Have healthy children. I shall see your descendants in the future, I hope, although I shall travel far in time. One hundred and twenty generations will have lived and died when I awaken and the Winters blood will have had time to spread throughout the entire world.

Oh, my son, I can hardly wait! It is nine o'clock now and I must get started upon my adventure. The call is stronger than the ties of blood. When I awaken, you will have been dead two thousand years, Vincent. I shall never see you again. Farewell, my son!

SO the disappearance of Norman Winters passed into minor history. The detective agency made its final report and received its last check with regret.

Vincent Winters married the next year and took up his residence upon his father's estate. Carstairs aged rapidly. He was provided with strong young assistants to carry on the work of the place.

He approached Vincent one day, years later, and made the request that he might be buried on the estate at the foot of the mound that now was covered with hemlock and rhododendrons. Vincent laughed at the suggestion and assured him that he would live a long while yet. But the old gardener was dead within a year.

Vincent had the tomb dug rather deeper than was usual, peering often over the shoulder of the laborer into the depth of the grave. But he saw

nothing there except soil and stones. He erected a heavy, flat slab of reinforced concrete on the spot.

"Most peculiar, if you ask me," said old Dibbs to the housekeeper. "It's almost as if Mr. Vincent wanted Carstairs' stone to last a thousand years. Why he cut the letters six inches deep in it!"

In due time Vincent Winters himself died and was buried beside the gardener at his earnest request. There remained no one on the Earth who remembered Norman Winters.

CHAPTER II

Awakening—in What Year?



IT was night and great blue sheets of flame lit the sky with a ghastly glare. Suddenly a blinding flash enveloped him. He felt a million shooting pains in every limb. He was lying on the ground, helpless and suffering. He fell into a brief unconsciousness.

A dozen times he awakened. Each time he shrieked with the pain in his whole body and opened his eyes upon a small room that was lit by a penetrating blue electric bulb. Numberless times he tried to move his right hand to shield his eyes, but found he could not force his muscles to obey his will. Days must have passed as he lay there, sweat soaking his brow with the effort.

Finally one day his hand moved up slowly. He lay for a full minute, recovering. He did not know where he was. Then from the depths of infinity a little memory came into his dulled brain—a memory with a nameless joy in it. And slowly his surroundings struck new meaning and a vast thrill coursed through him.

He was awake! Had he succeeded? Was he really alive in the distant future?

He lay quiet for a moment, letting the great fact of his awakening sink in. His eyes turned to the stone cabinet beside his couch. Slowly his hand

reached out and pulled feebly at the handle. A compartment on the left of his face revealed two bottles of yellowish liquor. With gasping effort he reached one and dragged it over to him, succeeding in spilling a little of the contents, but also in getting a mouthful which he swallowed.

Then he lay quietly a full half-hour, eyes purposefully shut and lips tightly pressed together in the agony of awakened animation. The medicine he had taken ran through his veins like fire and set nerves a-tinkling in arms and legs and finally in his fingertips and toes.

When he again opened his eyes, he was weak but otherwise normal. The stone cabinet now yielded concentrated meat lozenges from a metal box. He partook sparingly from the second bottle of liquid. Then he swung his legs down from the eiderdown couch, now tight-compressed from its original five feet to a bare two feet of depth by his age-long weight. He crossed the chamber to the clock.

"Five thousand!" he read breathlessly, clasping his thin hands together in delight.

But could it be true? He must get outside!

He reached down to a valve and filled a glass tumbler with cold water, which he drank greedily and refilled and drank again. He looked about curiously to note the changes time had produced on his chamber, but he had planned well. Little or nothing had deteriorated.

The pipe was coated with a few tiny cracks in its surface. Particles of white dust lay in them, where the cold water had gathered the moisture of the air by condensation. But this could not have been helped, for the stream of water through this pipe was all that kept the tiny generator turning. It made possible the heated chamber and the final blaze of the specially constructed X-ray lamp, which now filled his whole being with its life-restoring radiations.

Winters removed the cover from the power box and examined the motor and generator with great care. The chromium metal parts and the jeweled bearings showed no slightest sign of wear. Did that mean that only a few years had elapsed? He doubted his

clock's complete accuracy.

He replaced the covering and brushed off his hands, for everything was coated with dusty sediment. Next Winters examined the heating elements and placed a glass container of water upon them to warm. With more of his meat concentrate, he made a hot soup and drank it thankfully.

He went eagerly to the door in the lead wall and pulled at the locking lever. It resisted. He pulled harder, finally exerting all the strength he had in the effort. It was useless. The door was immovable!

He leaned against it a moment, panting, then stooped and scrutinized the door-jamb. With a chill of dread he observed that the leaden chamber-wall had become coated at the crack with a fine white dust.

It had oxidized the door into place! Had he awakened only to die here like a rat in a trap?

In his weakened condition, he helplessly felt despair creep over his body and mind. He sank back on his couch and stared desperately at the door. It was hours before the simple solution to his difficulties occurred to him. The locking lever—of course! It was of stainless steel and held to the door by only one bolt.

A matter of a dozen turns loosened the nut on the bolt and the lever came away freely in his hands. With this bar of stout metal as a crowbar, he easily pried into the soft lead wall beside the door-jamb. Obtaining a fulcrum, he put his frail weight on the end of the lever. The door gave inward an inch!

IN a few minutes his efforts were rewarded. The door groaned protestingly as it swung open. Winters looked up the ancient stone steps, half-lit by the room's illumination. Clad in his time-tattered garments, he went back to the chamber and commenced unscrewing a circular cover that was set into the wall.

It came away heavily with a hiss of air, for it had enclosed a near-vacuum. Winters pulled out neatly folded clothing. He was relieved to find a leather jacket that was still strong and perfect. It had been well oiled and was as supple as new. Some woolen things had not fared so well, but the stout corduroy breeches of

linen fiber seemed well preserved. He put these on.

A tightly covered crock of glass filled with oil yielded up a pistol designed to shoot lead bullets under compressed air and a neat roll of simple tools—a small saw, a file, a knife and a hand-ax. These he thrust into the waist-band of his breeches, which had been slit around the belt to accommodate them.

With a last look around, Norman Winters started up the steps, guided only by the light from the chamber behind. He stumbled over fallen stones and drifted soil as he climbed. At the top he came to a mat of tree-roots sealing him in.

Now the ax was wielded painfully by those enfeebled arms and many minutes passed in severing one small piece at a time. The cap-stone which had originally covered the tunnel had been split and pressed to one side by the force of the growing tree. After the third large root had been severed, a small cascade of dirt and pebbles let down on him a blazing flood of sunlight.

He paused and forced himself to return to his chamber. He filled a large bottle with water and slung it to his belt, put a handful of concentrated food in his pocket. He left the chamber for good, closing the door behind him and turning off the light.

It took only a few minutes to squeeze his head and shoulders through the opening between the roots. He looked about him with pounding heart.

He was in the middle of a forest!

Upon all sides stretched the great, sky-thrusting trees with here and there a clump of lesser growth, but set so evenly and spaced so regularly as to betray human oversight. The ground was softly deep in dead leaves and over them trailed a motley of vine-like plants. Winters recognized a cranberry vine and the bright winter-green berries among many others he did not know. A pleasant sort of forest, he decided.

He set off rather hesitantly through the trees to see what he could find, his mind full of speculations as to how long it must have taken these trees to grow. To judge from the warmth, it must be about noon of a midsummer's day. But what year was it?

Certainly many of the trees were over a hundred years old!

He had not progressed more than fifty yards before he came upon a clearing ahead. Passing beyond a fringe of shrubs he came into full view of a great highway. North and south it stretched far to the distant horizons. He stamped his feet upon the strange hard surface of green glasslike material. It was smooth in texture and extraordinarily straight and level. For miles he could look in both directions but, gaze as he might, no slightest sign of buildings could he detect.

Here was a poser indeed—where had the suburbs of New York gone? Had even New York itself joined the lost legion in limbo?

Winters stood in indecision and finally started tramping northward along the road. About a mile farther along had once been the town of White Plains. Even if it were no longer in existence, it would make as good a starting point as any.

His pace was slow, but the fresh air and bright sunshine set the blood pumping through his veins. He went faster as he felt his strength returning with each step.

He had been walking half an hour and seen no sign of human habitation when a man suddenly came out upon the glass roadway a hundred yards ahead of him. He was dressed in red and russet and held one hand over his eyes, peering at Winters. The man from the past hesitated and then continued to approach with a wild thrill surging through his veins.

The future man seemed in some vague way different from Winters. His skin was dark and tanned, features full and rounded, and eyes, Winters observed as he got nearer, a soft brown. The supple body seemed alert and exuded the very breath of health, yet it was indefinitely sensuous and indolent, graceful in movement.

Winters could not for the life of him decide even what race this man of the future represented. Perhaps he was a mixture of many. Then the man made a curious gesture with his left hand, a sort of circle waved in the air. Winters was puzzled, but believing it was meant for greeting, imitated it awkwardly.

"Wassum! You have chosen a slow way to travel!"

"I am in no hurry," replied Winters, determined to learn all he could before saying anything himself.

HE had to repress his natural emotion of excitement and joy. He felt an urge to shout aloud and hug this stranger in his arms.

"Have you come far?"

"I have been traveling for years."

"Come with me and I will take you to our orig. No doubt you will want food and drink and walling."

The words were drawled and his walk was slow, so much so that Winters felt a slight impatience. He was to feel this constantly among these people of the future.

The surprising thing, when he came to think about it, was that the man's speech was plain English, for which he was thankful. There were new words, of course, and the accent was strange in his ears—a tang of European broad As and positively continental Rs. He wondered if radio and recorded speech had been the causes of this persistence of the old tongue. They came to a pleasant clearing, lined with two-story houses of shiny brown. The walls were smooth, as if welded whole from some composition plastic. But when he entered a house behind his guide, he perceived that the entire wall admitted light translucently from the outside. Tiny windows were placed here and there purely for observation and air. He had little time to look around, for a huge, dark man was eying him beneath bushy gray eyebrows.

"A stranger who came on foot," said his guide. He turned to Winters. "This is our Chief Forester."

He wheeled abruptly and left them together, without the slightest indication of curiosity.

"Wassum, stranger," said the Forester. "Where is your orig?"

"My orig? I don't understand."

"Why, your village, of course."

"I have none."

"What—a trogling?" the Forester exclaimed.

"I don't understand," repeated Winters, puzzled.

"A wild man, a herman. Don't you understand human speech?"

"Where I come from, there were several forms of human speech, sir."

"What is this? Since the dawn of

civilization two thousand years ago, there has been one common speech throughout the world!"

Winters made an excited mental note of the date. Two thousand years, at the least, had elapsed since he entered his sleeping chamber!

"I have come to learn, sir. I should like to spend several days in your village, observing your life in—er—an elementary sort of way. For instance, how do you obtain your food here in the middle of a forest? I saw no farms or fields nearby."

"You are wassum to the walling, but what are farms? But why should you want to see fields? You will travel many a mile before you find a field near here, thanks to our ancestors. We are well planted in fine forests."

"But your food?"

The Forester raised his eyebrows.

"Food? I have just said we have fine forests, a hundred square kilos of them—food and to spare! Did you walk with your eyes shut?"

"Where I come from, we were not used to find food in forests, exactly. What sort of food do you get from them? Remember, I said I wanted elementary information, sir."

"Elementary indeed! Our chestnut flour for baking, naturally, our dessert nuts and our vegetables, like the locust bean, the Keawe, the Catalpea and a dozen others—all the food a man could desire. Then the felled logs bear their crops of mushrooms. We have a famous strain of beefsteak mushroom in this orig. And of course the mast-fattened swine for bacon and winter-fats and the pitch pines for engine oils—the usual forest crops. How can it be that you are ignorant of the everyday things which even schoolboys know?"

"Mine is a strange story, sir," replied Winters. "Tell me what I ask and I will tell you later anything you want to know about myself. Tell me things as though I were from another planet, or from the distant past."

Winters forced a laugh.

"This is a strange request," grunted the Forester.

"And my story, when I tell it to you, will be stranger still. You may depend upon it."

"It should prove amusing, this game. Well, then, this afternoon I

will spend showing you about and answering questions. After our meal tonight you shall tell me your story, but I warn you to make it a good one. Make it good enough to repay me for my time."

CHAPTER III

Woodland World



THEY went out into the sunlight together. The village proved to be a gathering of about fifty large houses, stretching for a half a mile around a long, narrow clearing. The background consisted of the huge trunks, gnarled branches and dark green of the forest.

The Forester himself was a rather brisk old fellow, but the villagers seemed to strike again that vague chord of strangeness, of indolence, which Winters had noticed in his first acquaintance. Groups lay gracefully stretched out here and there under the trees. Such occasional figures as were in motion seemed to move with dragging feet, to Winters' business-like mind.

Gradually he realized that these people were downright lazy, and this he afterward observed to be almost invariably true. They accomplished the work of the village in an hour or two a day, yet this time was actually begrimed and every effort was being made to reduce it. The chief effort of world-wide science was devoted to this end, in fact.

The people were dressed in bright colors. The green grass and the rich brown of the buildings made a pleasant background to the colorful picture. Everywhere he saw the same

racial characteristics of dark, swarthy faces and soft, liquid, brown eyes. There was something strange about the eyes, almost as if they were not set straight in the face, but a trifle a-slant.

Little attention was paid Winters, except for occasional glances of idle curiosity aroused by his unusual attire. He thought the women unusually attractive, but the men seemed somehow effeminate and too soft. It was not that they weren't fine specimens of humanity physically speaking, but their faces were too smooth and their bodies too graceful to suit his twentieth century ideas of what vigorous manhood should look like. Their bodies suggested feline grace and lethargy, combined with supple strength.

Winters was told that a thousand people usually formed an "orig." Just now there were several hundred extra inhabitants and a "colorig" had been prepared fifty miles to the north. Trees had been growing for half a century there, making ready for the new colony.

"But why should you not simply make your village large enough to keep the extra people right here?" he asked.

"The forest supports only so many in comfort. We are having trouble now as it is."

"But are there no larger villages where manufacturing is done?"

"Of course," said the Forester disdainfully. "There are factory origs near the Great Falls in the north. Our airwheel goes there twice a week—a two-hour flight. But there are only a few people there, just enough to tend the machines."

The people of the village seemed happy and obviously contented with life, but most of the younger men and women seemed to Winters too serious. Their dark faces hardly ever showed a smile.

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UNDER OBSERVATION

(Continued from page 10)

piece of the mag and also the membership blank, 257 N. Grand Ave., Baldwin, New York.

So you're beefing about that cowboy on horseback? And him all ready to lasso you some prize beef all ready for the refrigeration plants on icy Pluto? Yuh've got me corralled, pardner, and I reckon I can't explain why the Cap should have been roamin' the range. Smokin' sombreros, but it looks as if the printer did some ad-libbing while ye editor was sipping a jug of Xeno juice. Either that, or the Futuremen must have slipped in time or something. Put down that six-shooter, pal—we'll lynch the editor from the highest hickory on Uranus next time he passes us an illustration that belongs in "Out West With Captain Future."

And here's another ranny who complains about the Cap takin' Horace Greeley's advice. Well, waddy ya know?

OTHO ON FRONTISPICE

By LeRoy Tacket

I've just finished "Star Trail to Glory" and it's the best yet. The Brain's method of locomotion is a swell improvement and Future's run in with the octopus-men was a swell twist. When Future turned his good will projector on Grag and Otho it added a good bit of comedy to the story. The beginning of Hamilton's novel was swell and I liked the ending too.

The pictures were excellent, especially the one showing Curt and the octopus-man; but how did that cowboy on page 53 get in there?

I think Molesworth has the right idea when he says cut out the shorts and instead stick in some incidents of Future's early cases. I don't like the idea of getting rid of Oog; we couldn't get along without him and his imitations. How about bringing the octopus-men back in an early issue so we can find out whether they found their new home or not?

Your covers are O.K., but how come Otho always gets left out?

I'm glad to see that Ul Quorn will be back in the next issue. And if that novel tops the adventure of the seven space stones, it'll have to go some.

And speaking of issues, is there a chance of getting some back issues? I'd like to get the first few. (Try our backnumber dept.—Ed.) All of which reminds me, why don't you put CAPTAIN FUTURE out monthly?

Before I sign off I'd like to say that the edges should be trimmed.

And so until the next issue I remain a Loyal Captain Future fan. Fountain, Colorado.

Holy sun-umps, but can't you guys live and let live? That ranch fiasco won't happen again, or you can hang me over a barbed wire on the Bar-None Flying Spread. Honest, fellows, the incident got your old sarge so sore he's off western omelets for life.

The acrobatic android sure merits cover representation. I'm passing along your suggestion to the art editor, and if he fails to have Bergey illustrate the elastic entity in oils I'll give Otho the word to stretch Bergey's neck from the Moon all the way to the Big Dipper.

And now here's a radite-reeking missile from Pilot Jimmy Megas that I've had soaking in a tub of water for the last two

[Turn page]

To People who want to write but can't get started

Do you have that constant urge to write but the fear that a beginner hasn't a chance? Then listen to what Fulton Oursler, editor of Liberty, has to say on the subject:

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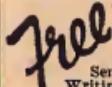
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hours. It seems harmless enough now, so cut in your radiophones on his blasts:

SCIENTIFLAWS

By Jimmy Megas

Yesterday I bought a copy of the Winter edition of **CAPTAIN FUTURE**. I have read everything in it excepting the novel itself. So far, **CAPTAIN FUTURE** has proven to be a superior mag in comparison to the many, many others which are offered for sale at newsstands. Keep up the good work and **Captain Future** will continue to merit top rank in the Science Fiction field.

There are two incidents which prompted me to write this letter. The first one is as follows:

Last night I read the story entitled "Not Yet the End," by Brown. It was an excellent "short" and I enjoyed it. Tonight the first thing I read was your special feature entitled "The World's of Tomorrow." If you will bear with me, allow me to quote here the first sentence of this article.

"Mars, the third planet from the Sun, is the oldest in the whole System." Automatically I said to myself, "Whoa! Back up, Mars, the third planet from the Sun?" Hastily I rifled the pages to the story mentioned above, "Not Yet the End." After going through the magazine about ten times I became exasperated. In desperation I turned to the contents page, there to discover that it was only necessary to turn but one page and . . . there was the sentence.

The point, speaking bluntly, is this. There are at least a half dozen places in the story in which the author mentions the third planet. For instance page 97, next to the last paragraph in the first column mentions the third planet of the Star Z-5689. Again, page 98, second column, 9th paragraph mentions the third planet and so forth. What I'm getting at is this. After having read the story I was impressed with the idea that it was our Earth that these visitors of outer space were exploring and because of the fact that they capture two monkeys to determine the type of life existing on this third planet instead of humans, the human race was saved—thanks to the monkeys.

The point is, after dragging you this far, if you are still reading, while your feature says Mars is the third planet—the story says the Earth is. Maybe I'm wrong, but I'm slightly inclined to take sides with the story. I was under the solemn impression that Earth and not Mars is the third planet of our Sun. Nevertheless, some one slipped up here. Tch tch . . .

The next thing concerned is the new serial, "Mutiny in Space." If I'm not mistaken author Edwards states on page 103, first column, first paragraph, that only eight men

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could make the trip to Venus. Captain Led-
yard and seven others, making a total of
eight.

Would you mind asking artist Paul to count
the number of men which he has portrayed
in the picture, depicting a scene from the
story? If I'm not mistaken I see TEN. As
a matter of fact I'm looking at them now.
Six times I have counted. Six times I got ten.

Please don't misjudge me, sir. I didn't go
through the magazine just itching to find er-
rors. The two that I mentioned just stuck
out like a sore thumb. At least they did to
me. You could probably find more errors in
this one letter of mine than there are in the
entire magazine. As I have said before, I read
CAPTAIN FUTURE in preference to the others
and I like the Captain the best. But, if
we want the Captain to remain undisputedly
on top, we've got to be careful.

And so with parting words may I say keep
up the good work and . . . see you next time.
—1733 Perry Street, Jacksonville, Fla.

Well, draft me into a cyclotron and
atomize me urgently if your squawks aren't
well taken, Jimmy. Why, even a two-
months-old Martian brat knows that Mars
is fourth from the Sun. Which only goes
to prove that Ed Hamilton is a three-timer
who used to play hooky from Astronomical
College. Go in the corner, Ed, and write
"Mars is the fourth planet from the Sun"
one thousand times. We'll learn you.

As for the pair of extra passengers illus-
trated by Paul, they're the additional Fu-
turemen requested by Rocketeer Calewaert.
That's what happens when you try to please
everybody.

All jesting aside, lad, them's mistakes of
the first magnitude, and if it happens again
there'll be a shake-up in our Terrestrial Of-
fices that will reverberate into the sixth
dimension.

And now a whole-hearted suggestion
that would amend our half-illustrated map
series.

BOTH SIDES WANTED

By Sam Basham, Jr.

I have read every issue of the CAPTAIN
FUTURE magazine so far. Each issue is bet-
ter than the preceding one. However, I have
two suggestions to make. One is to show
both hemispheres in your WORLDS OF TO-
MORROW dept. and let CAPTAIN FUTURE
have at least one adventure on each planet of
our System before he explores other uni-
verses, time travs, etc. One more suggestion.
Please print coupon for applicants for
membership in the FUTUREMEN Club as
tearing off the namestrip gives the magazine
a ragged appearance.—Bardwell, Ky.

P. S.—Enclosed is a namestrip for member-
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son, and we'll see what the board of di-
rectors does about augmenting the map
situation. It should be easy to toss you
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[Turn page]

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A DASH OF ROMANCE

By Sylvester Brown, Jr.

First let me say that although I was disappointed not to see Taine's "The Time Stream" selected as the next Hall of Fame story, I think you made an excellent choice in Manning's story. I hope you will reprint Taine's novel after the conclusion of Manning's.

No matter what Ed Hamilton may say about the altruistic aspirations of Captain Future, he's still human and, therefore, there should be some romance between him and Joan. You don't have to put in a lot of trash, but just enough to melt CF a bit. Get what I'm driving at?

I'm in favor of a more or less descriptive story in which CF goes far ahead in time, as in Wells' "The Time Machine." —7 Arlington Street, Cambridge, Mass.

Oscillating orbit of Mercury, son, but did you notice that CF goes in for a bit of oscillation in the novel for this issue? Sure, juxtaposition of the lips can happen anywhere in the Universe when boy meets girl. The Cap'n is "that way" about Joanie, but why should he get hitched and be exempt from the draft?

Words of appreciation always win thanks from the bottom of our crusty old ticker. So tune in on this floral offering while I blush underneath my space-tan.

A-1 WORK

By E. Montgomery

I am very pleased with the smooth writing that you usually find Hamilton doing. I think the characters in Future's band perfect. I only hope the author's original plots do not remain in a rut like a needle on a broken record. But from all appearances, it does not appear to. I like the way he has given the various space ship makes—Riggsian, Zanior, Tark, etc.—individual personalities.

I see that you have Bergey for a cover artist. Swell. His tone quality in pictures make them look almost like photographs, and an artist must be good to do that. I also see that Wesso and Bergey get together on their picturization of Grag.

May I again compliment your staff and magazine for its A-1 work?

The only criticizing I have to do is on Wesso's fat space suits. But again, that's typical Wesso. I guess every s-f artist must have some fat so he'll get slammed. I think Wesso is all right, and I am glad to see him in with a magazine that's tops in scientificition.—Blackfoot, Idaho.

Have a slab of Plutonian peach pie, son, for them kind words. And here, wet your whistle on a jug of Xeno. That's a man's drink, lad, so fasten your gravity belt. Two sips and you'll be accelerating so fast you'll make a meteor seem stationary.

But here's a radite bomb that's meant to slow down passenger Stanley Kovan. Run for cover, peelo! You're being blitzed!

PROTON BLAST

By Mariet Goebel, R. N.

I want to join your CAPTAIN FUTURE Club. Have been interested in science for years. I like Curt Newton's clean way of living, and the possibilities of a model that helps others.

Yes, I agree, take Stanley Kovan's letter away, and bury it deep. Who asked him to pull us to pieces anyway? What's he mean, Ed Hamilton can't hold a reader's interest? If Kovan wants to know who's one-sided, tell

him to take a look at the outside of a one-track mind in the mirror. After all, if he wants science the library is full of books. I read for pure enjoyment and get it.

Doesn't Kovan keep up to date on science? Doesn't he know that there are invisible rays at either end of the spectrum? What's so impossible about gravity equalizers? A hundred years ago his same species frowned on talking over distance. Who ever thought we could talk to Europe? Who ever dreamed men would fly through the air? What's got to go on about Duke University's experiments in extra-sensorial perception? Nuts, tell Mr. Kovan to dig a hole and bury himself. He's too antediluvian.

Sorry, Sarge, I'm afraid we got my Spanish blood "filled" up.

Anyway, I'm for CAPTAIN FUTURE and I want to join your Futuremen. Enclosed is a stamped self-addressed envelope and a name tag.

Before we tell this space-tramp to go hop on a runaway meteor, Mariet, let's listen in on what he has to say. Red Spot of Jupiter, but the lad's space-struck. Hear him rant:

IN SELF-DEFENSE

By Stanley Kovan

I have here next to me a copy of Captain Future's latest adventure, "Star Trail to Glory." Availle ages you mentioned something about getting away from the same old plot in this story. This is not so.

The race around the System was only a cover-up for the same old plot. Don't get me wrong. It wasn't the same as all the stories, but it still seems that if you have read one of the issues you get the general drift of them all.

Just why, may I ask, must Captain Future himself and his companions be the greatest so-and-sos in the System? Greatest scientific genius, greatest pilot, greatest disigner, greatest... *and* *living* *heat*.

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sounding razzberry. In closing, may I request that the people who disagree with me, please write to me. All correspondence will be answered.—74 Wellington Street, Hartford, Conn.

Go stick your cranium in a pool of mercury, you space-sick hobo. Get off our ship before I let the gang aim their sizzle guns at that pebble-sized nodule you call a head. And don't show your carcass around our port for at least a sidereal year or I'll kick it into the next total eclipse.

Seriously speaking, brother, I don't mind your yammerings, even though your letter packs more brickbats than a meteor swarm. Your old sage can take it as well as ladie it out, so don't spare the cyclotrons. I've been toasted in a Wilson cloud-chamber by experts.

Maybe the past stories have been a little too formula, lad. And maybe they've been tops, as the other pilots say. Anyway, read THE LOST WORLD OF TIME, in the next issue, and then write me and let me know if you think Captain Future hasn't jumped ahead by a light-year as far as originality and newness go.

Well, you junior pilots and space veterans, the mail-sack's as empty as a hole in space. It's journey's end once more, and I've enjoyed the radite bomb-tossing fest! All your suggestions for improving the Futuremen are carefully filed away, and I don't mean in the fourth dimension. Shoot me your etherflashes and spacegrams—or just shoot me.

—SERGEANT SATURN,
the old space-dog.

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[Turn page]

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—THE EDITOR.

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MEMOS ON MERCURY

(Concluded from page 102)

May thirty-first, Midnight.

Dear Rick:

I won't lecture you, but you've got to postpone your stew! You must get an exclusive interview with Halbert for us. *Multiplanetee* needs you. I'm a cosmic hean, an abysmal ass, a primordial dope—at five cents a word. You're the greatest newsman that ever lived. Your poetry is divine. Orby is all right, too. But what can he offer you that I can't? Triple salary on the spot!

Brown

June first, Noon.

Dear Chief:

You're darned right Orby is all right! But you seem to have the idea that Orby is a male of some species. No, my pal. She's a woman, a lovely one.

Note the date, Chief? It's my wedding with her that I can't postpone. There won't be any more stews, incidentally. Orby insists on that.

My poetry was what won her, Chief!

We've talked it over and decided we'll take your offer. I believe you promised four times my former pathetic salary? Anyway, Orby doesn't want me in pictures, or even in Hollywood, for some reason. We'll have our honeymoon on Venus and I'll carry on for *Multiplanetee* at the same time, on the Grand Tour.

Exclusive interview with Halbert coming to you via radio-cable. He is one happy man, Chief, even happier than me, his humble instrument of redemption.

Your Extraterra Correspondent signing off for the present. We're taking the next liner for Venus, to be married in space.

Rick

June first, one-fourteen P. M.

Dear Rick:

Congratulations, sight unseen! I won't have to lecture you any more—at five cents a word. Orby can take the job, at whatever rate Cupid charges. Make a poem out of that....

Brown

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THIS
BEAUTIFUL DESK
for only \$1.00 EXTRA

WITH ANY
REMINGTON
PORTABLE TYPEWRITER

The
COMBINATION
FOR AS LITTLE AS
10¢ A DAY

How easy it is to pay for this combination of desk and Remington Noiseless Portable Typewriter! Just imagine, a small good will deposit with terms as low as 10¢ a day to get this combination at once! You will never miss 10¢ a day. Yet this small sum can actually make you immediately the possessor of this amazing office-at-home combination. You assume no obligations by sending the coupon.

THESE TWO EXTRA FOR YOU

LEARN TYPING FREE

To help you even further, you get free with this special offer a 32-page booklet, prepared by experts, to teach you quickly how to type by the touch method. When you buy a Noiseless you get this free Remington Rand gift that increases the pleasure of using your Remington Noiseless Deluxe Portable. Remember, the touch typing book is sent free while this offer holds.

SPECIAL CARRYING CASE

The Remington Noiseless Portable is light in weight, easily carried about. With this offer Remington supplies a sturdy, beautiful carrying case which rivals in beauty and utility the most attractive luggage you can buy.

SPECIFICATIONS

ALL ESSENTIAL FEATURES of large standard and office machines appear in the Noiseless Portable—standard 160-key keyboard; back spacer; margin stops and margin release; double shift key and shift lock; two color ribbon and automatic ribbon reverse; variable line spacer; paper fingers; makes as many as seven carbons; takes paper 9.5" wide; writes lines 3.2" wide. There are also extra features like the card writing attachment, black key cards and white letters, touch regulator, rubber cushioned feet. These make typing on a Remington Deluxe Noiseless Portable a distinct pleasure. Thousands of families now using the Remington Deluxe Noiseless Portable know from experience how wonderful it is!



MAIL
COUPON
NOW!

A beautiful desk in a neutral blue-green which will fit into the decorations of any home—trrimmed in black and silver—and made of sturdy fibre board—is now available for only one dollar (\$1.00 extra) to purchasers of a Remington Noiseless Portable Typewriter. The desk is so light that it can be moved anywhere without trouble—it is so strong that it will hold six hundred (600) pounds. With this combination of desk and Noiseless Deluxe Portable Typewriter, you will have a miniature office at home. Learn the complete details of this offer. Mail the coupon today.



Remington Rand Inc., Dept. 160-6
465 Washington St., Buffalo, N. Y.

Tell me, without obligation, how to get a Free Trial of a new Remington Deluxe Noiseless Portable, including Carrying Case and Free 32-page Typing Instruction Book, let on terms as low as 10¢ a day. Send Catalogue.

Name.

Address.

City. State.